

THE SPIRIT ASLEEP

EVELYN QUINLAN

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THE STORY :

This is the gripping and often moving story of Australian youth to-day. It traces, in the person of Pat Donahue, the restlessness, the energy, the surface uncouthness, and the half-felt, half-realised aspirations of the adolescent emerging into manhood.

Every incident is a stage in Pat's development—every person he meets an influence on the ultimate determining of his character. Chief of these, and an underlying motif, is the deep, but only dimly felt influence of his father, a failure in the eyes of the world—but a man with a strange and rare gift as a parent. There are, besides, his mother, against whose forceful but pathetic efforts to advance him he rebels ; the girl Margot, for whom he cherishes a shy but passionate devotion ; and the Austrian composer, who awakens in him new dreams and a sense of wider horizons.

Pat is no wistful romantic. He is virile and robust. He looks unafraid on the shape of the new world at present coming into being. He is of his generation, and of his young nation with all its possibilities. He is the man of to-morrow.

THE SPIRIT ASLEEP

By

EVELYN QUINLAN

HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED
3 DUKE OF YORK STREET, ST. JAMES'S
LONDON, S.W.1



First printing

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*All the characters in this book are purely imaginary and have no
relation whatsoever to any living person*

PART ONE

THE GANG

I

PAT never forgot the day the other boys set on him in the park. He didn't understand how he could have drawn on himself their combined hostility. He had always got on well with them. In his pride he had imagined he was popular—because he had adapted his personality to their standards : he was as slack in his speech, as careless and uncleanly as they, he condemned what they hated, he extolled what they approved. No casual observer could have picked him out from the others ; from Tiger or Hadley Rowe or Curly, from Bill or Jem or Micky. Yet, there was a difference ; and he knew it as well as they. He was the son of an educated man ; and although his father had descended in the social scale to marry, and had remained ever since at his wife's level, nothing could alter the fact that Conal Donahue was a gentleman.

It might indeed have been a distant glimpse of Julie Donahue alighting from the tram on her way home after a day's shopping in the city, and clad in the ostentatious style she favoured for these occasions, that let loose a world of trouble on the unprepared head of her son.

They were passing the gloaming hour between five and six on a June afternoon in dangerous aimlessness. The trees in the park held up bare branches to a leaden sky ; a faint, threatening flush tinged the western horizon, while the light wavered and took on a sickly pallor.

They had worked what devilry they could : twisted the swings onto the high crossbars from which they would only be dislodged with difficulty, removed the screws from the see-saws, cut their names deeply into the trees, and cheeked and insulted every girl and small boy who was unlucky enough to have to

pass them by. Then, bored and restless, they turned their attention to one another, and gave voice to the crude expression of their uninhibited personalities.

Unfortunately it was at this point that Julie Donahue swung into their orbit, and as quickly disappeared in the direction of her home.

"Say, Pat—" It was Tiger who led the assault, and where Tiger Weatherall led the rest were bound in duty to follow, "why does your ma always dress up like a red hot tart—with jam on?"

His own words struck him as so enormously amusing that he was suddenly convulsed with laughter: in it the others, with the exception of Pat, joined.

"She shouldn't make herself such a pain in the neck for us all," Curly Matthews agreed. "Paint and perfume—and that hair! Redder every week, my mum says. If it's jam you're thinking of, Tige, it's raspberry. Red, red raspberry!"

"You shut your blasted mouth, you filthy little swine," Pat retorted flushing. "Everyone knows about your mother—drinking in common pubs."

"It's a lie!" Curly shouted, while Hadley Rowe, on his behalf, counteracted more tellingly.

"That sounds fine coming from you, Pat Donahue. It's no secret that your old man drinks like a fish. That's why his high and mighty Toorak family kicked him out. Although there's others that say it was his taste for raspberry jam," he added reflectively.

"You'll take that back, Hadley Rowe—or I'll knock your damned block off."

"I'd just love to see you."

"Give it to him, Had," someone exhorted, while Tiger, not to be outdone by his subordinates, made a further contribution:

"'Sides, your old man's an Irish traitor. My dad says all the Irish are traitors."

"My dad's not Irish."

"Sez you? 'Course he is. And you're one too. Dirty Irish traitor!"

"I tell you, I'm not Irish. I'm an Australian. Like you."

He looked at them, and saw they were leagued together to form an implacable front—against him. It isn't nice—the thought passed swiftly through his brain—it isn't nice to have everybody against you. But that feeling went, and anger came in its place, and he was glad because anger always invigorated him, it was altogether more manly and therefore more admirable than the horrible sensation of being lost and alone.

He clenched his fists.

“ I'll knock hell out of the lot of you.”

“ Oh, you will, will you ? Come on, kids. Give it to him ! ”

They fell on him. He fought them with everything he had, fists and feet and head ; he pulled and twisted and struggled to get free ; every now and then he managed, with a strength that was not quite his, to strike out at one of them, and wherever he struck he left his mark ; but there were six of them, and in time they bore him down, and all too soon he felt the shameful proximity of the sodden earth.

“ Here ! You leave that kid alone ! ” A woman's angry voice broke across their noisy, laboured breathing. “ Six to one ain't fair. You're a set of bullies—that's what you are. And him smaller than any of you. Beat it now—or I'll get hold of someone to make you ! ”

With elaborately lurid imprecations against interfering females, the six friends made a leisurely departure, leaving Pat to raise himself from his lowly position, not sure whether or not he were maimed for life, but fairly certain he would never be quite the same again.

The woman, a stout housewife, with a basket on one hand and a string bag in the other, stood at the iron railing which separated the park from the street, and looked him over as closely as the failing light would allow.

“ Are you hurt, dearie ? What a shame ! But it was a blessing I happened to come along. They might have half killed you, the brutes ! ”

“ I'm all right.”

This was the final and most humiliating blow. That a woman should have seen him laid so low, been sorry for him, and interceded on his behalf, was as cruel as anything he had ever known.

He, Pat Donahue, who was everywhere admired for his toughness, had become an object of pity to a casual passer-by, and a feminine one at that. He hated her fiercely.

"Can you get home by yourself?" she went on, quite unaware of his animosity.

"For God's sake, lay off asking silly questions and let me alone. I'm all right, I tell you."

"That's gratitude, if you like." The woman spoke in an offended tone. "I'm sorry I interfered. Like as not they was only givin' you what you deserved." And she continued on her way.

Pat set off across the park towards home. His friends—but they were now his enemies—lived on one side which was Richmond, but, by the grace of God and a few hundred yards, he resided in East Melbourne, an altogether superior locality, as his mother was always impressing on him.

He stumbled over the uneven ground, partly because it was growing dark, and partly because his body seemed unequal to the task of carrying him at the usual pace and balance. He was conscious of pain in his left eye, and his nose, which had come in contact with the iron railing, felt like an overgrown turnip, and persisted in dripping blood. Yet his battle scars were not his chief concern. Indeed, if he had come by them in some other way, he might have been glad enough to carry them home and display them to the consternation of his parents, especially his mother. But he was enveloped in a feeling of shame. He had been overwhelmed by the boys' dislike of him, and against this, as well as against their physical attack, he had been unable to defend himself. He was utterly miserable and discouraged. The world . . . and it was, indeed, all the world he knew . . . was against him. He didn't belong with the others. They had made it sufficiently clear. They couldn't accept his father or his mother; so it followed they couldn't accept him. More than anything Pat wanted to be accepted—every impulse in him was towards that end. But circumstances had thwarted him.

His father spoke with the accent of a cultured man. He even wrote poetry. Pat had never dared to hint to anyone this

most disgraceful secret. That Conal drank was more widely known. It was, of course, the reason why he was exiled from his own people. The accusation of Irish birth had some element of truth—but the strain went further back than Pat's father, who had been born in Melbourne. What Pat didn't know was that the boys had used that taunt only at random—only to put him in another camp—to emphasize a peculiarity that made him seem different from themselves. Anything else would have done as well. But they had the weapon and they used it without scruple, and Pat felt deeply that generations of Australian blood were not sufficient to dilute the foreign strain.

His eyes, he told himself bitterly, were against him, for when not discoloured with the scars of combat, they were clear blue, thickly fringed with dark, curling lashes—eyes which were the inheritance of his race, no matter how far they had drifted from their island home, or how widely their seed was dispersed.

Pat was not proud of his one good feature, and for many reasons, but chiefly because a silly girl had once come up to him and said "Crikey, what wouldn't I give to have them lovely long lashes of yours. Like to swop?" And she had actually caressed with her little finger the luxuriant growth on his lids. Pat's reply cannot be put upon record for he was gravely insulted, and when his temper held sway he did not select the most chaste words in his vocabulary.

The woman who in mistaken kindness had championed him had called him small—and that, too, had rankled. But his lack of inches were fully compensated for by his solid build. For his age he was very heavy, and his muscles, fondly tended, were well worth exhibiting to his friends. It was a painful thought that singly he was a match for any of the boys who together had overwhelmed him.

For the rest he had dark hair which he kept closely shaved in what he considered a manly style, and which was the despair of his mother who implored him to let it grow longer "like a gentleman's" (That was reason enough, as Pat saw it, to keep it short, for gentlemen ranked very low in the social order of his fellows). His nose was blunt, and his mouth obstinate ("sulky" his mother called it when she was annoyed with him,

and "determined" when she wasn't) and he had a very unattractive habit (cultivated) of scowling violently, which drew down his brows so much that they partly obscured his eyes.

As he came out of the park and approached the cream-coloured stucco house, Eastridge, where he lived, he espied Mr. De Courcy Traynor, one of his mother's lodgers, also making his way, but from a different direction, towards the same goal. So he returned to the park and waited until Mr. Traynor had opened the front door with his latchkey and gone inside. It was not so much dislike of Mr. Traynor—although this did exist—which made him act thus, but fear of possible questions and disclosures.

To the right of the gate a brass plate bearing the words "Residential. Superior Accommodation. Proprietress, Mrs. Donahue," proclaimed to the world the nature of the business Pat's mother carried on. The fact itself he was far from minding; what he did object to was her determined effort to shroud it in a veil of false gentility and refinement. Julie spoke of her "guests," never of her lodgers, and pursued the illusion that Eastridge was a "home from home", where only the most vulgarly minded referred to the surreptitious transaction which must of necessity take place at the commencement of every week. It was entirely fallacious for Pat knew, or sensed, that his mother was a relentless, business woman, whose own experience of poverty had made her quite without pity—except for herself.

II

He opened the gate and entered the small front garden with circumspection. Most of the space enclosed between the wooden fences was filled by the large, square house, the water-stained walls and faded woodwork of which revealed the parsimony of the landlord who turned a negligent ear to Julie's oft-repeated requests for repairs. Along the side of the house ran a narrow path which led to the rear premises, where, things being as they

were, Pat and his family mainly forgathered. He went down this path, and in at the back door which opened direct into the large, low-ceilinged kitchen.

His mother and Doreen, the thin, untidy maid-servant who had long been bullied by Pat's mother into a servility Pat would have disdained, were busy preparing the evening meal. They opened their eyes wide in astonishment at the sight of him, and their unfeigned horror made him conscious of the fact that he must look a pretty sight. That, at least, was some consolation.

"Pat! Whatever's happened? Have you been in an accident?" Julie Donahue demanded.

Instead of answering her he went across to the sink and applied cold water to his swollen nose. As he leant over, bright red drops fell on the white porcelain, and he felt rather proud of his ability to bleed so profusely. Here was something to excite the curiosity of these women, who had not witnessed his humiliation, for all they knew he had suffered his injuries in some most glorious action.

"Will you tell me what's happened?" his mother asked, coming over to him. "Heavens! And your eye too! It's all bunged up. What have you been doing?"

Still he maintained silence. It was his practice not to reply to his mother's all-too-numerous queries unless he chose. He addressed her only if he wanted something, and then he spoke to some effect, coaxing, threatening, refusing to take no for an answer: Pat could do what he liked with his parents, and well he knew it.

His silence provoked his mother, and piled exasperation on top of her anxiety.

"Out with it. Don't be sulky. You're the sulkiest boy I ever saw. Aren't I your mother? You know you've got to tell me everything."

"I bet he's been fighting, Mrs. Donahue," interposed Doreen sagaciously. "Down there in the park, with them rough Richmond larrakins." By this remark Doreen showed herself to be a renegade from her class—a fact that Pat had long suspected.

"Is it true, Pat? Have you been fighting?" inquired his mother in alarmed protest, for to her fighting was the most detestable of crimes. "Why can't you keep away from those

dreadful boys," she went on. She had an intense, snobbish dislike of Pat's association with the local boys, and resented bitterly the lack of support she received from her husband and her husband's family in her efforts to procure for Pat an education and social connections suited to a gentleman's son.

Glancing at her sideways, Pat saw both her annoyance and her concern. She had removed the finery she had donned for her expedition to the city, and wore a stained cretonne apron over her black frock, which like all her clothes mingled the stale perfume of cheap floral extracts with perspiration engendered by the strenuous work of the kitchen; her hair, the brilliant red hair on which the boys had passed adverse comment, was tied up in a striped silk handkerchief. (And although he had hotly denied their allegation of its being dyed, he knew quite well that it was, at least, tampered with beyond nature, for he had, on one occasion, fished the paper-wrapper which she said had contained only shampoo from the kitchen tidy, and read thereon the dreadful justification of his suspicion. Honour had prevented his ever revealing this, and his sense of honour was finely, even a little extravagantly, developed; but of sympathy, understanding of another's subterfuges, generosity for human weakness, he had scarcely a glimmer.)

Julie's wide brow was furrowed by an unbecoming frown as she looked at him, and her curious green eyes with their tinge of gold narrowed.

"I wish you didn't have to go to a State school and mix with all those cheeky brats . . . It's a shame. It's them that teach you rough habits and bad words and no respect for your father and mother. You don't belong with that sort. They've taught you to fight, and they'll lead you into worse mischief before they've done . . . Here. Hold your head up! Your nose'll never stop bleeding if you hang over like that. Get me a towel, Doreen."

Pat drew away from her ministrations.

"Oh, cut it out, Mum. I'm not going to die."

With that he went and left them and went up to his room.

This room of his was reached by an outside staircase above the back door, and was actually an attic without contact with the

rest of the house. It had been built as a storeroom, but was now Pat's very private apartment, where only the most daring ventured to set foot, except at the owner's invitation.

Refusing to have its sanctity violated by female interference he was permitted, after a number of wordy battles had given him victory, to keep it in what order (or disorder) he liked. Following a certain method apparent only to himself, he had stored away and arranged his possessions and, when he saw fit and proper, he swept and dusted and discarded. It was often a matter of surprise to him when he heard his mother complain of the drudgery of housework; he felt that as far as he was concerned it was an amazingly simple affair. But then, in most things he did, he saw only good.

Under the sloping rafters (there was no ceiling) he had sufficient space for everything—his work-bench near the window on which stood the model yacht he was making, his bookcase overflowing with the stories of adventure in which he delighted, the Micky Mouse wireless his father had given him, his stamp-collection, his bottled snakes and lizards, and his menagerie: a white mouse, a toad, a pair of tortoises, which he kept in wire-covered boxes suitably equipped to satisfy the several dispositions of his favourites, while high above his head in the rafters there reposed his chief favourite, a possum named Molotov, who gained entrance through a hole in the roof Pat declined to have repaired: in the corner near the door was his old toy-box, scratched and lidless, its contents falling gradually into disuse.

To-day he found no interest in these accustomed joys; he had no heart to continue work on his yacht or offer Molotov an edible token of his regard. He felt that some sad and sorrowful music would best suit his afflicted spirit. Lying on the bed which stood in the middle of the unstained, wooden floor, he switched on the wireless and tuned in to the different stations, but all were engaged in broadcasting the children's sessions, which often amused him, but now struck him as absurdly juvenile. So he switched off again and lay listening to his mother's and Doreen's voices and footsteps in the kitchen below, muffled by the intervening floor.

After a time he heard a third voice joined in conversation

with the other two, and an intermittent cough, which he recognized as his father's, and soon he heard steps on the outside staircase and Conal Donahue appeared at the door.

The newcomer stood on the threshold a moment, as if unsure of his welcome, for Pat had been known, in times of temper or family upheaval to have forcibly ejected intruders from his domain. However, he remained where he was on the bed, and watched his father advance.

"Hullo, Pat," said Conal, taking up a stand at the bed-foot. "I hear you've got hurt, so I've brought you something for your eye."

He didn't ask how Pat had met disaster; he rarely asked questions. It was his way to accept facts, and deal with present effects, rather than delve into past causes.

In a tired manner, his heavy lids dropped over his light blue eyes; he had the look of a man bored with life, yet troubled by it, watchful and unsure. It was a misleading look. Fundamentally Conal was friends both to truth and reason—he knew them in their most odious and their most splendid forms; in spite of his day-dreaming, he saw the shape of reality, and he was not afraid by what he saw. But his outward showing inspired little confidence in anyone, least of all his son, and his manner, except when he had been drinking, was markedly shy and unpretentious, so that Pat always felt years older than his father, and treated him like a younger brother, bossed him, and called him by his Christian name, a liberty his mother would not allow him to take in her case.

Conal now produced a piece of raw beef-steak.

"Just the thing to stop your eye from going black. Let me put it on for you."

Pat's stomach was durable enough, but he was not quite himself, and the sudden sight and smell of the raw meat nearly made him vomit. He turned aside his head.

"For God's sake, Conal, take the damned thing away!"

Conal raised his thinning grey eyebrows in mild amazement.

"But, Pat—you don't want a black eye, do you?"

"Yes, I do. I like having a black eye."

"Oh . . . So you like having a black eye?" His father

accepted this extraordinary proclivity of his son's with the wonder he had always experienced when he remembered he was the means whereby a life—and a male life—had entered the world. He had never got used to it, and it was the reason why he was being continually surprised, and a little awed, when this child of his loins showed signs of developing an individuality.

"Oh, well—if you like having a black eye I won't deprive you of it. And do you like having a bloody nose too?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well—then there's not much I can do . . . Is there anything you'd like me to do?"

"Yes. I'd like you to get the hell out of here."

Conal wasn't hurt. This male child of his had a perfect right to express himself in any way he chose; he would not for anything hamper or suppress Pat's natural growth.

"If that's how you feel, old man, of course I'll go." And he moved towards the door.

But Pat was afraid his father might suspect him of wanting to indulge an unmanly weakness—which, to tell the truth, had been rising in him steadily for a long time—so he said in the toughest tone he could muster:

"I don't feel anything. I'm quite able to look after myself. And I don't care what anyone thinks of me."

"That's right. That's the spirit. Don't you give a damn for them, old man. I understand." And he went out and down the stairs.

'Old man' made Pat squirm. It suggested to his mind public schools and Toorak snobs and a stuffy British tradition. (All tradition to Pat was 'stuffy'.) 'Old man' was nearly as bad as 'old chap', the use of which he had forbidden his father. Conal was capable of much; "Don't give a damn for them" bore witness of that. But Pat was constantly being reminded by some utterance of his father's that Conal belonged to a higher grade of society than the members of Tiger's gang, with whom Pat in admiration and envy had identified himself. He so deeply desired their favour that he was more than willing to espouse the cause of the working class from which they sprang.

And now as the thought of Tiger and his gang brought vividly

to his mind the insupportable mental and physical injuries he had sustained, Pat wanted more and more to give way to the weakness in him, and cry. But at the same time he knew very well that he couldn't because he had lately turned thirteen, and no matter what tears might be squandered by a twelve-year-old they were not to be permitted by a fellow in his teens. Besides, crying was condemned as sissy and outlawed by the gang. So that, even though he was alone he managed to control himself, in obedience to the unwritten code whereby he had chosen to live.

And a strict code it was, narrow and binding as the code of a religious order. Aggressive manliness, pugnacity and mischief in general were its chief virtues ; while the arts, love, any sort of sentiment, filial obedience and God—God especially—were held in contempt, and voted ' sissy '.

Especially did the gang admire bad language, and Pat, in the hope of cultivating their approbation, had acquired a loose tongue, a choice collection of oaths and a shocking accent. Now, to force back the unwelcome tears, he thought over all the swear words and vulgar expressions he knew—and a formidable collection it was. By the time it was completed, he found that the tears had frozen up inside him, and he felt really hard and tough again. He also felt lonelier than ever before in his life.

III

When he awoke next morning he was immediately conscious, not only of something unpleasant that had happened, but of something unpleasant that was still to happen. He would have to face the boys again. They might set on him again. They might—and very probably would—tell all the others at school, both boys and girls, how he had been forced to take a ' hiding '. They would look at him ; some—his own sex—with contempt : some—the girls—with pity. He would hate both. He did not want either to be despised or pitied. He wanted to be admired, respected—feared.

At breakfast, a hasty and untidy meal, partaken of in the kitchen while Pat's mother and Doreen prepared the more sedate meal for the 'guests' who would later be served in state in the dining-room, his father said to him :

"Feeling up to school to-day?"

"You bet."

"Sure you wouldn't like to stay at home? I'll write you an excuse."

A sense of joyful release lightened his spirit. He needn't go to school. He needn't face his enemies. He could go back to his room and work on his yacht and clean out his silk-worm cases and listen to his wireless. He could stay up there all day long. And it was Friday. There was the whole week-end to follow. He would have three days to heal his scars and gather together the tattered strands of his courage. Three days. Seventy-two hours of freedom. . . .

But then, like a cold wind from an unfriendly outside world, there came the thought of what the boys would say. They would say he was afraid of them—afraid to come to school.

He shook his head.

"No. I've got to go."

That cost him a good deal. He did not remember having wanted anything as much as he wanted to stay at home to-day.

His father was looking at him steadily, and their eyes met.

"Just as you like, old man."

A sudden spurt of irritation seized him and he rose swiftly from the table, saying as he did so :

"Don't call me a man till I am one," which was only temper, for the state of being a man seemed very close at hand.

Deliberately he went about getting his lunch and his books and putting them in his bag ; he didn't look at his father again or speak to him, nor did Conal attempt any further overture. But he knew his father was watching him, and guessing a whole lot, more than he would ever tell him. And he resented it. His private affairs were his own, and he wanted no prying, least of all from his parents.

Yet it had been nice of Conal to suggest his staying at home. if only he could have accepted !

With admonitions from his mother to refrain from fighting, he set out for the local State school. The fresh, cool air stung his cheeks, and he realized he was only seeing with one eye—the other was fast closed and heavy with pain, while, looking down with the good eye, he could see his own swollen nose. No wonder his father had thought him unfit to go out.

As he approached the school building he was alarmed by certain physical reactions: his stomach felt light and empty, as though he hadn't had any breakfast (but he had eaten well enough) and his heart was beating somewhere high in his throat where it had no business to be; his legs belonged to anyone but himself, and joined with his mind in wanting to run in some other direction than the one in which he was moving. Was the distance so short? Was he there already?

He slowed down. He would not turn the corner until the bell rang. Better to suffer his teacher's wrath than risk meeting his former adversaries in the schoolyard.

God! he thought, I'm scared. It's a case of blue funk, and it's in my guts and in my legs and I've got to go through with it and no one's going to know . . . I'm damned if they are. I'm small, he thought, but I'm heavy; I weigh more than most blokes of my age: weight's more than inches. God! I'm glad I'm heavy.

There was the bell. From every direction boys and girls were running. Pat walked slowly after them. Across the yard; up the steps; and his stomach felt more than ever like a balloon filled only with air, and he wanted to run away, and he went in at the door, and down the passage. . . .

The class was assembled and Miss Balmain looked up with a frown at his late arrival.

"Well, Patrick Donahue, and what's your excuse for being late this time?"

"Please, miss, my mother's ill and I had to get breakfast." He was quick enough at invention.

"I hope you made a better job of it than you did of your spelling exam yesterday . . . But what have you done to your face?"

"Walked into a telegraph post in the dark."

This was greeted by a burst of suppressed laughter from the class ; Pat felt he had scored.

"Nonsense, you've been fighting." The laughter had not been lost on his teacher.

Pat looked at her from under his lashes.

"You seem to know more about it than I do."

"That's impertinent. Sit down, and stop wasting our time."

Miss Balmain had coloured ; she felt somehow that Patrick Donahue had made her look a little ridiculous. It was not the first time. Of all the boys she taught this one knew best the tone, the phrasing of insolence.

Pat went to his place. A quick glance showed him that all members of the gang were present and watching him. He sat down with studied casualness and folded his arms. It was a wise move, for by it his hands were hidden, and they were shaking.

As he took out his arithmetic book, it came to him what he must do.

He would have to fight the six boys who had attacked him.

Not together, of course. One at a time. Each must in turn be made to realize that they couldn't lay hands on him and get away with it. Life wouldn't be worth sixpence if they thought they could.

When he had perceived this, things returned to their normal places. He knew what to do and how to do it. His mother was dead set against fighting. Well, who'd expect a woman to understand ? Anyway, he didn't care . . . He'd mastered his fate—and his fear was gone. He looked at his hand as it held the pen. It was not trembling any more. It was steady—a good, steady hand on which he could rely.

In the lunch hour he walked to where Tiger and his first lieutenant Hadley Rowe stood with Micky Timms, and thus accosted them :

"Look here, you blokes. I'm going to fight each one of your bloody gang. Who's going to be the first ?"

"Gee, St. Patrick, you're swell," grinned Hadley, who went often to the pictures, and admired American slang. "Who'd have thought of our little St. Patrick putting the rough stuff over us !"

"Cut it out, Pat." That was Tiger. "You know we can't fight here. Teacher don't like brawls."

"I don't mean here. After school. In the lane near your house. I'll take you on to start with."

But Tiger declined. "I'll be referee. I'll see it's dinkum. You better begin with Hadley. He's our champ. If you can knock him out you're O.K."

"I'll tell the gang," volunteered Micky. "Four-thirty. Ring-side seats a penny . . . and we'll use the takings to get ourselves some grub after the show."

Pat saw they bore him no ill-will: his unpopularity had been only temporary. The idea of a fight, properly stage-managed, held attraction for them, but it was a sporting instinct, deeply ingrained, and not animated against himself.

"I'll say we did some damage," Tiger commented, regarding the black eye with respect. "Left our mark on him, didn't we, Had?"

"Too right," Hadley agreed. "He looks like something the cat brought in, don't he?"

"It's nothing to the mark I'll leave on you," Pat answered pleasantly.

IV

After school the gang, accompanied by a selection of hand-picked onlookers, including a few girls who were not too blatantly sissy, and could be expected to survive the sight of a little bloodshed, gathered in the cobbled lane at the rear of Tiger Wetherall's house, where they hoped to be undisturbed. On either side they were shut in by dilapidated paling fences which leaned drunkenly, as though about to fall in the next gust of wind. Rubbish tins, bursting with their loads of refuse, stood outside each back gate and a few scraggy cats with fierce hungry eyes skulked among them. It was an unlovely spot, but eminently suited for the purpose.

Tiger, as master of ceremonies, referee, dictator, and a good

many other things, grouped his gathering in as wide a circle as the narrow lane made possible, and opened the proceedings.

"Ladies and gents, you are now goin' to see a couple of champs the like of which don't often appear in the ring these days. Things ain't what they was, so a treat like this don't usually come our way in years. On my right is Had Rowe, a real basher, what don't know when he's licked nor never will. On my left, we have the Irish heavy-weight" ("Australian," Pat interposed with a frown, but Tiger persisted :) "the Irish heavy-weight, Pat Donahue, who already bears on his handsome dial the scars of many another bloody scrap."

At this the spectators broke into loud applause, cat-calls and cooees, while the two antagonists removed their coats and rolled up their sleeves with business like efficiency.

Then they took up their positions facing each other, and waited for Tiger's signal to commence. Tiger, however, liked nothing better than playing to the gallery, and he was not going to relinquish the limelight too soon.

"So now we're set. Just sit back on your seats, ladies and gents"—("We aint got none, Tige," someone interrupted, but Tiger was equal to that)—"I mean of course the seats what nature gave you," he said loftily, and this brought him the laugh his soul craved. When it had somewhat subsided he continued: "I'm here to see it's all dinkum, and you can bet I will. There won't be no funny business. A clean fight to a finish—that's what you're going to get for your money. And it'll be the fight of the year. These two blokes——"

"Oh, shut up, Tige, we want to see the fight," called out Jem Watson, "you can spout after."

"That's right," many voices assented. "We came to see the fight, not to listen to Jack Weatherall."

Seeing the assembly was against him, Tiger magnanimously bowed to public opinion.

"O.K. blokes—the fight it will be. Are you both ready? Then take it away!"

So it began. Hadley Rowe was a slim, fair-haired boy, nearly a head taller than Pat and a year older, with the added advantage of long arms and legs. But Pat had the weight.

They fought quite unscientifically, but the onlookers who loudly voiced their approval of a particularly violent contest, were none the wiser. Hadley was determined not to let himself be knocked out by a boy younger than himself, and one moreover who was not a member of the gang, an outsider from another suburb, from another kind of society: Hadley had the reputation of his fraternity in his keeping. But Pat had even more at stake—and he fought with a pugnacity that had in it something of body, mind and spirit, all three. . . .

A wild, barbaric yell from the spectators. Hadley Rowe had measured his lanky, loosely-knit form on the cobble-stones. Tiger, madly excited, leapt into the air shouting:

“One, two, three. . . .”

The rest joined in raucously:

“ . . . eight, nine, ten. OUT!”

They swarmed round Pat, beating him on the back, shaking his hands, yelling at him the highest form of praise they knew. “Good on you!”

“Good on you, Pat . . . you won . . . as sweet a knockout as I ever seen . . . you’re the champ now . . . good on you, kid. . . .”

“Ladies and gents—the winner!” bawled Tiger, not to be outdone. “What about three hearty British cheers!”

They gave them with fervent abandon, and Pat glowed. He had proved to them that, man for man and all things equal, he was as good, or better, than the best they could put against him. He had knocked out their champion, fair and square, with his own left hook, and the discomfited Hadley, now struggling to his feet, was tenderly feeling his jaw where the victor’s fist had gone home. Indeed, the vanquished hero looked so despondent that Pat felt a twinge of pity for him. From his own experience he knew how it felt to embrace the resisting earth. It was lousy.

“What about the next fight, Tiger Weatherall?” he asked, cloaking his sympathy, and speaking in a harsh, loud voice, so that everyone could hear him. “I want to knock out all six of your gang—and that goes for you too.”

“My! You’re out for blood, ain’t you? Take it easy.

You beat the champ. That'll do for a bit." For Tiger, despite the vanity he had in his own organizing powers, knew his limitations as a fighter. When the others had drifted away in search of refreshment he added in a lower voice: "You can join the gang if you want to."

You can join the gang. You can be one of us. Ever since his family had moved to their present locality, a year or so ago, Pat had wanted to be a member of Tiger's gang. He needed urgently to belong somewhere, to be part of a group, and not a mere looker-on at joys he couldn't share. Now, by his own exertions, that happy consummation had been attained. He was very grateful to Tiger for his offer—and he would very much have liked to thank him, but he didn't know how to do it. All he said—and gruffly at that—was:

"O.K. You need a heavy-weight in your setup. Hadley's too light. I'll show you kids a trick or two."

His patronage nearly destroyed the good impression he had made; Tiger looked as if he regretted his generous action.

"Hadley got you in the other eye, anyhow," he said, with evident satisfaction. "Now you got two of 'em."

v

After they had disposed of a number of liquorice straps and acid drops from the corner shop, the gathering broke up, and Pat set out for home, his step light, his lips pursed in a muted whistle.

He had not gone far when he heard someone running behind him, and he turned his head to see who it was. As he did so the runner waved and signalled to him to wait, which, being in a good humour, he did, although it was only Jem Watson's sister, Violet. She came up to him, her cheeks deeply pink from her energetic chase and her untidy plaits bobbing about on her shoulders. She stopped when she caught up with him in order to recover her breath and Pat, growing impatient, walked on, wondering that girls should be puffed so easily. Violet,

however, was persistent as well as breathless, and she soon fell into step beside him.

"Gosh, Pat, I think you're wonderful," she gasped.

Pat barely restrained a smile. His victory had brought the world to his feet. Like some great conqueror he might, if he chose, command the servitude of the masses. But remembering that the truly great are not without humility, he gracefully dismissed her extravagant praise.

"No, I'm not. I didn't do anything—much."

"Oh, but you did. I saw you knock out Hadley Rowe. And Jem always used to say he was the best fighter in the gang."

Feeling that it was not necessary to humble himself too far, Pat made no reply to this, so Violet repeated with more emphasis and better control of her breathing :

"I think you're wonderful."

There was something in the melting coyness of her glance that changed his pleasure to annoyance. She really looked very silly.

"Lay off, Vi. Hadley wasn't so hot. It was easy enough."

They were moving up the hill towards the district where Pat lived, and away from the more lowly quarter where the Watson's house was situated. It was growing dark: the short winter day was almost over. With dramatic suddenness all the street lights burst into brilliant life.

"You're coming out of your way," he told her pointedly. He could see she was gathering herself together for some momentous pronouncement: her breath came quickly as it had done after she'd been running, and her cheeks gained an even deeper pink.

"I'll kiss you if you'd like it, Pat."

He was utterly, witheringly disgusted.

"I wouldn't like it at all. I'd hate it."

Violet opened wide an expressive pair of hazel eyes.

"Don't you like kissing?"

"Never tried it. And I don't mean to—ever."

"If you've never tried it you can't know what it's like. I'm pretty good at it. You'll see. I've had lots of practice."

Even to Pat's immature ear there seemed something fundamentally wrong with this.

"You're a sloppy little sap. It beats me how any bloke could be bothered messing round with a girl—if she was anything like you." He spoke with deliberate heartlessness, for by this time he was sick of Violet and only anxious to be rid of her.

But girls were an undiscovered land to Pat: he didn't know that opposition was an incentive to further efforts by Violet.

"D'you mean you don't like girls?" she asked, and already she was planning how he might be induced to make an exception in her case; it would be an achievement of no little merit to pursue and capture a woman-hater.

"I don't like or dislike them. I just never think about them," he replied coolly. "I haven't any time to waste," he added, as they came in view of Eastridge, "so, as I happen to be rather hungry, I'll say goodnight."

"Oh, Pat, you are mean!" And at last he knew he had thrust home. She was hurt by his mention of being hungry. Jubilantly he told himself it was the line to take on future occasions of the sort, when he had importunate girls on his hands. "You're the cruellest boy I ever knew!" and Pat had an uneasy suspicion she was working herself up for tears. So he said very briskly:

"Good-night, Vi. See you at school Monday." With which he hurried through his own front gate and slammed it with vindictive finality.

Fortunately for his peace of mind he did not see the glance of devotion Violet gave his retreating figure. His victory over Hadley had made him a hero, and Violet fancied herself as captor of a hero's heart.

VI

But heroes cease to be, when the door of their own house closes behind them. Pat knew it was only a matter of time before his mother noticed his second black eye, and he postponed the moment of discovery with diligence but little hope.

It was Doreen's night out so his mother was at first too busy

to notice him unduly. He found her in the act of carving the joint and serving the vegetables, and knowing that she would also have to wait at table he was able to enjoy his dinner without having to submit himself to verbal molestation. He sat with Conal at the side table near the kitchen window, and they discussed the football game they were going to see on the following afternoon. Conal had the *Herald* propped up against the water-jug and he read aloud extracts to Pat, as was the customary procedure at the evening meal. Conal made no comment on Pat's appearance, and seemed unaware of the fact that he bore additional scars on his face which had not been there when he left home in the morning.

On the maid's night out Pat and his father always assisted in the drying up while Julie washed the dishes.

For this task Conal enveloped himself in a capacious apron which went twice round his lean frame, drew up a chair, and seated himself ready for the operation, one of his damp, badly-rolled cigarettes drooping from his lips. Pat, with a bad grace, also took up a towel. They were half-way through the business when Julie suddenly noticed his damaged face.

Julie had had a bad day. One of the lodgers had complained about a trifling matter, another had had to be reprimanded for going behind with his weekly payment, the butcher's bill was higher than it had ever been, her feet ached, and, besides everything else it was Doreen's night out. Conal gave her no real help, nor even supported her. The unfairness of the fact that she, the woman, was forced into the position of bread-winner while her husband went his way in irresponsible freedom had never struck her so forcibly. She had met that day a friend of her maiden years, a woman who had done well for herself in the way Julie Donahue passionately desired, the way she had thought would surely be hers on her marriage to a gentleman. Life was piling up on her so that her nerves ached, and she longed to find an outlet for her pain and exhaustion: and all at once she found it in the sight of her son's face.

"Pat, you've been fighting again! How can you when you know how it hurts me!" She spoke with an emotion which seemed to the other two out of proportion.

"Hurts me more than it hurts you," her son responded with exasperating calmness.

"Then you were fighting? You admit it? Why have you got to make yourself look like a prize-fighter? You've got nice eyes too. People have often said so."

"They're a lot nicer now than they ever been," he answered with a grin.

"Than they ever were," his father suggested mildly, brushing a trail of cigarette ash from the meat dish he was wiping.

"They're nicer than they ever been, Conal," Pat repeated with impudence. "I done myself well this time."

"As long as you did as well by the other fellow, I'll forgive you for slaughtering the King's English," Conal replied. "I hope he looks one-tenth part as bad as you do."

But the light passage between her men-folk was not in keeping with Julie's mood. She had chosen to take Pat's misdemeanour seriously to heart, but in some subtle way she blamed her husband as much—possibly more.

"You'd stand up for the boy if he'd committed a crime," she said. "I think you like the idea of him getting into fights with rude, bad-mannered children."

"I like the idea of his holding his own—and giving back what he gets."

"There you are! You're on his side against me. But I don't mind. I'm going to see he's brought up properly. He'll be a gentleman like his father—even if his father doesn't act like one," she added with ill-expressed, unreasoned logic. From the father she turned to the son. "Pat, you must promise me not to get into any more of these horrible quarrels."

Before he could answer, Conal said gently but very firmly:

"He can't do that, dear."

"Why?"

"Because he mightn't be able to keep such a promise. You shouldn't force him into a position which he might find untenable."

"I don't understand." And Julie vented her wrath on a grimy saucepan, scraping it clean with angry vehemence.

"No." Getting up Conal hung the towel he had been using

on the string line before the old-fashioned range, where the glowing embers of the fire were slowly dying. "It's not the sort of thing a woman could be expected to understand."

This argument was, to Julie, the most damaging, because, for all she might loudly protest against its truth, she felt that it embodied a deeply-embedded manifestation. Conal's mind moved in a sphere unknown to her, and she dreaded that someday he might show Pat the rarified places where she could never follow. Against this half-realized danger she struggled with untrained, feminine determination.

"Of course I can understand my own son. I'm his mother, aren't I?"

"All right. Let it be." As if weary of the discussion he removed the large apron, and, while Julie emptied the dishwasher down the sink and Pat packed away the crockery in the kitchen dresser, he spoke what were apparently meant to be his concluding words:

"It's not fair to Pat to bind him with a promise that might prevent him from asserting his right as a free agent."

Julie took him up at once with redoubled energy.

"You mean you like him to fight."

"In a good cause—yes."

"Well, was it a good cause that got him those black eyes?"

"I expect so."

"Do you know what he was fighting about?"

"No."

"And you're not going to ask him?"

"Certainly not. Nor are you. Pat is under no obligation to confide in us. It's enough for me—and it should be enough for you—that if he decided it was worth fighting for, it was a good cause."

With one accord they both turned and looked at Pat, who, seeing himself the centre of their regard, stuck his hands in his pockets and began to whistle in an off-hand way. The conversation, although it concerned himself, was growing rather boring: and he wished it would hurry up and end. Still, he might as well stay for the finish.

His mother continued the attack.

"Will you at least stop him from seeing so much of that Weatherall boy, Conal? That Tiger, as they call him. His influence on Pat can only be a bad one."

"No one can have a bad influence on Pat, if he develops his own powers of resistance. He was born with a will of his own. It's his job to cultivate it."

This, to Julie, was impossibly lax and fraught with perils uncounted; Conal had no sense of the conventional.

"You know as well as I do, Conal, that the world is full of temptations." Now, let him deny that!

Conal shrugged his thin, bony shoulders. Taking out his tobacco-pouch and a cigarette-paper he proceeded to roll a slovenly article, which he put into his mouth and lighted before he replied.

"Temptation," he said rather dreamily. "Even Christ was offered the world on the devil's terms. We can give our son the same chance of rejection." And then more forcefully: "What about it, Pat? Have you learnt to say no yet?"

"That's my business."

"Granted. You're not required to answer the questions put to you. They're forced on you by outside circumstance and because of that may be disregarded. But don't neglect to answer the inward questions of your own soul. They must have an honest reply, if you're going to live on good terms with yourself."

Pat looked at him keenly. He wondered if his father had been drinking. Usually Conal only talked this way when he had been indulging himself excessively. It was at those times that the fire in him sought liberation, and he gave expression to a strange, inner life which went on tumultuously beneath the stooping figure, the prematurely grey head, the diffidence, and the deplorable idleness. But none of the well-known signs being apparent, except the volubility, Pat concluded that something other than drink had stimulated his father. And then he thought of the dusty volumes, the sheets of untidy manuscript in Conal's room, and he remembered that he and his mother, two literal people, had to deal with a poet.

Catching his glance, Conal returned it with deliberation, and

Pat knew that as far as his father was concerned his choice for the future was in his own hands. His mother would try to force him into the narrow, civilized groove of her ideal—which constituted being a gentleman. Conal's bounds encompassed the earth.

VII

Pat went up to his room.

All his life he had listened to his parents scrapping about him. His mother who, whatever might be said, was the material support of the three of them, had for him a comprehensive plan, built on the destruction of her own hopes ; she had, moreover, the drive, the unconscious dishonesty to achieve it. As a small boy he had found his equally definite personality in conflict with hers. Gradually he had piled up against her a barrier of resistance. The years had only strengthened it, making it more impregnable, because as he grew older he saw in his mother the chief opponent of his development. Yet all she did for him, all she planned, was based, as he very well knew, on her love for him. That was the devil of it. Every time he took his own way in preference to hers, often in the heat of temper, he felt a prick of shamed conscience. He wished then that she were a real enemy, outside relationship, whom he dared hurt without compunction.

But she was his mother.

How and why she had attracted the wayward, unpractical spirit which dwelt in his father's insignificant body, he could not fathom. They were totally dissimilar, in birth, education, ideals, everything.

Once at an early age—oh, six or seven—he had asked his father :
“ Conal—why did you marry Mum ? ”

Conal considered the questioner more than the question. He never played with Pat, put him off with less than the truth.

“ Part of the search,” he answered.

“ What search ? ”

But Conal's further replies had been obscure.

Still, the phrase stuck. Pat often took it out and examined it. In time he put into it something of his own. Conal was engaged in a search. For what? A woman? Would any sane bloke spend his days searching for a woman? Was Mum the ultimate goal? Surely not? Conal had said *part* of the search. That hardly suggested fulfilment.

Was it drink then?

Pat was used to the fact that his father drank. When he was very young he had known moments of revulsion which left behind a deeply buried emotion which lay for years untapped—but, apart from that, habit had inured him to an inescapable truth: Conal had to drink.

It was periodic; but when it came it was as steady, as remorseless as a thunder-storm.

If pity had been a quality possessed by Pat in any degree of development, he must then have pitied his mother the lengths to which she was put to hide their disgrace from their 'guests'. Her husband was ill. It was a lie no one believed, and which she knew no one believed, but for appearance's sake must be made as convincing as possible.

In vain did she try to prevent him having any money of his own—he gave her most of what little he earned by writing willingly enough, but there was always a percentage he retained. Her next attempt was to discover where he hid his bottles of whisky; and up to the time before they came to the house in East Melbourne her efforts had nearly always been ultimately successful. (They had moved in a desultory fashion from house to house since they left Pat's first home in Bendigo, where Conal had been editor of a weekly paper which went bankrupt and further incurred general dislike because of its forthright disrespect of generally accepted standards.) Eastridge, however, looked like being a settled abode for some years at least. It was soon after they came to Eastridge that Conal found a satisfactory hiding-place for his whisky; a place where Julie would not dream of looking, because to her a child's room, a child's play-box, would have been sacred. Conal indeed had his sacred reservations—but in this matter they were untouched. Pat's

play-box was the perfect repository for the one thing he would not be denied: and Pat, in all innocence, had made his room forbidden territory, especially to his mother.

Still, despite his lack of ordinary morals, Conal would not have abused this sanctuary without first asking his son's permission; he disdained to use his paternal authority against another human being.

"What do you say, Pat? May I put my bottles in your toy-box? It'd be a good place to keep them. But it's up to you."

Pat considered it.

"I suppose you want to hide them from Mum. She says drink is a blooming waste of money. And d'you know, I think she's right." He was not often in such close accord with his mother.

"Do you mean you don't approve of drinking?" Conal suggested.

"I think it's a bloody waste of money," Pat persisted, "besides it doesn't do you any good. Does it?"

"Physically—no. In fact, it does quite a lot of harm. Inside. I'll explain to you sometime. We'll draw a diagram of a fellow's innards, and you'll soon see what a rotten business it is. . . ."

"But why," Pat interrupted impatiently, "why in blazes do you do it?"

Conal rolled a cigarette thoughtfully. "After the war," he began. "I couldn't settle down. My father gave me enough money to satisfy that restlessness. I roamed over the face of the earth. I had every experience possible to a young man. Nothing satisfied me. At last I realized that I was looking for something. I couldn't be happy until I found it." He broke off, and gave himself up to meditation.

"Was that what started you on the—the search?" Pat inquired.

"The search? Yes. That was it . . . The search for peace . . . for spiritual communion with the infinite . . . what simple men, perhaps mistakenly, call God . . . but I am not simple, and I cannot accept a temple made by man . . . The God I sought may have dwelt in palaces, He was also in the den of thieves. . . ."

"What," said Pat, practically, "has all that to do with drinking?"

"I'm telling you. For years I tried to discover the where-

abouts of this divinity . . . in the churches, in the art galleries, in the governments of states, in lands more beautiful than I had imagined. . . .”

“It’s a wonder your money held out.”

“Well, I’m coming to that. Soon I found my father’s fine legacy was all spent, and I was no nearer the solution of the mystery. I had tried the land, there was still the sea . . . I signed on as a member of the crew of a small cargo boat plying between Sydney and Cape Town. . . .”

Pat voiced his approval of that move. “It’d do me bonzer. And did you find what you were looking for?” He had a very hazy idea of what Conal was looking for.

“There less than anywhere,” his father answered. “I thought I could get along with all sorts of men . . . but, the coarse brutes I had in contact with me for weeks and weeks . . . impossible as companions . . . almost, it seemed to me, without souls. . . . No, Pat, I found nothing but awful loneliness, such as I’d never experienced before. . . . It was then I started to want drink, more than anything I’d ever wanted, more than food or a woman. . . .”

“What would you want a woman for, anyway?”

“That’s a story for another day.” Conal’s reminiscent mood suddenly dissipated: the sight of the candid eyes of his son with their unplumbed depths of inexperience pulled him up; he must not, in his endeavour to reveal truth, take Pat too far beyond the confines of his little sphere. He rose. “Nobody can stop me from drinking,” he said. “Until I can merge myself, and become one with the spirit I seek, I’ll go on drinking.”

Pat tried to fathom it, but he couldn’t. “I think you’re nuts, Conal,” he said. “But you can hide your bottles up here if you want to. It’ll be rather fun. Like a conspiracy.”

VIII

Pat lived an immense, secret life of his own. None of the boys knew—his parents hardly knew—how he filled his mind

with stories, heroes, with brave adventure, with cunning, and daring in the face of death. Because of them, his imagination was developing. He lived in the books he read, he lived the lives of his heroes, fully, completely. Be he an outlaw, a gangster, a bushranger or an Elizabethan buccaneer, he took for a time some elements of this figure, so that his attitude, his modes of expression, were culled from his conception of this or that character. To him the toughest were the most admirable. For those who went 'soft' about women he had no sort of use, and when the love interest intruded too strongly the book was discarded half read.

The night of his fight with Hadley Rowe he went up to finish *Beau Geste*. He had at first found the gallant hero and his brothers not quite virile enough: they were too chivalrous, too much the English public school type he abhorred: but soon he found himself unable to hold out against the appeal of their adventures. By gradual degrees he began to take to himself the qualities of the hero. Without that, reading was to him meaningless. He must identify this person with himself.

So that when a few days later his father, in the course of conversation, happened to ask him what he would like to do when he grew up, he answered quite naturally, and without undue thought:

"I'd like to join the Foreign Legion."

Conal found this reply particularly amusing, but Julie, who overheard it, scolded him for being silly.

IX

Her hopes for Pat's future were bound up mainly in expectation of assistance from Conal's brother. Stephen, who had not used his share of his father's legacy in the wild, spendthrift fashion of his brother, was now reaping the material benefits therefrom. A stable member of society, he was managing director of a prosperous shipping company. Ambitious as he was popular, he had made a very successful marriage with the daughter of one

of Victoria's richest pastoralists (the aristocracy of what is ostensibly a classless country).

The Stephen Donahues resided, naturally, in that eminently suitable suburb of Toorak, and their beautiful home was the envy and passionate absorption of Julie's life.

To her friends she boasted of her husband's connections, and let fall many a hint of what they would eventually do for Pat. She was always putting before him the splendid possibilities to be looked for if they did things "the right way". The only result of this was to arouse his pride against the idea of favours, and make him unnecessarily rude to Stephen and Catherine, his wife, on the occasions when he went with his parents to visit them.

It was one more of the disappointments Julie was forced to suffer. She found Conal's brother distinguished and charming, while Stephen's wife represented, in some bitter, frustrated way, all she would have liked to be.

There were times when Catherine had sent her money—when Pat was born, when Conal lost one job or another, whenever Julie had sufficient excuse to write her husband's relations what he called "a hard luck letter".

But more than anything else, she ardently desired that Stephen should assist her son in reaching what she considered his rightful place in the world. This, she hoped, would commence with his paying for Pat to attend a good school, where he might mingle with the gentry instead of the riff-raff.

"Stephen hasn't any son of his own, only a daughter, so why shouldn't he do it?" she complained.

But Conal had also tiresome notions about favours, which Pat, either by inheritance or example, had acquired. Pat's, however, were of a more sterling fibre than his father's, for Conal had a way of cashing the cheques his brother sent him, after the usual display of hurt vanity and a declaration that he would return them by the very next post. This pitiful inconsistency Julie was not slow in pointing out.

Half-a-dozen times she made up her mind to go and beg for her son's future, and each time Conal, weak though he was in the matter of cheques, prevented her.

"He's my son. And I mean to have the bringing up of him."

She caught him up angrily :

"Your son—yes ; but you'll never do anything for him. You went to Melbourne Grammar, you and Stephen. Why should Pat have less than the best ? I'll tell you why. Because his father's less than the best."

She said things like that, knowing he had long ceased to care what she said. She hadn't the power to hurt him. She had never had it. He moved on another planet than hers. Her anger, her feminine little cleverness, could not reach him there. Only her love for him and his for her could find him on the heights, and bring him back to her.

He now took up her insult, and considered it without rancour.

"Less than the best, dear ? What is the best ? Is it to be a gentleman ? What about the pioneers of our land ? I don't recall that they wore white collars. Years of book-learning won't equip him for the back-breaking toil and the great reward that are waiting for him somewhere in his native earth."

She responded with all the violence he had once admired and now found exhausting—her tawny skin flushed and her eyes, the golden-green eyes, were hot and angry, eyes which nearly hated.

"He shan't go on the land ! I won't have it—never, never ! I've seen too much of it. It killed my brother. I hate the land !"

The storm of her fury subsided, for to it he added nothing. He just stood facing her—they were the same height, for she was a tall woman—and looking back through the years they had come together. He had found her employed as waitress at a small café in Bendigo where he had gone to edit the ill-fated weekly. She had made him think of the painted madonnas he had seen in Europe during his search for spiritual rest. She had that ruddy, glowing aspect, lively and bright with promise : the sparkling eyes, the young, unconsciously voluptuous figure with the wide curve of breasts, where perhaps peace, so long desired, might at long last be found. . . . She was to be his anchorage, the woman in whom he would find the eternal beginnings of things, the wife, the mother, the harmony of earth's fulfilment and man's completion.

But that, like all the rest, was to be an illusion, a mirage without substance, delectable to behold, and, for a time, most lovely in the having, so that the enchantment was slow to fade. But fade it did, because the physical woman satisfied but one need, and that a waning one—the spiritual woman, the companion, the friend, simply did not dwell in that flesh.

So much for that part of the search. . . .

“Neither you nor I can settle Pat’s future for him, my dear,” he said, as he turned away. “Nor, for that matter, can Stephen. It’s his own life—for him to make or mar.”

X

Pat had no conscious feeling of affection for his father. There were times when he was acutely ashamed of him. But somehow he trusted him. He trusted his judgment and his loyalty. Without conscience, he enlisted his support in his battles with his mother.

Besides poetry, Conal wrote articles for the newspapers; red, flaming truths, which were, as often as not, returned by alarmed editors. Yet on his shelves were three books of which he was the author. Pat, feeling they were beyond his adolescent powers, had not troubled to sample them. Indeed, with the exception of the fairly popular *Gates of Morning* collection of poems which had gone into two or three editions, Conal’s work was beyond the powers of most. There had been a time when intellectuals had hailed Conal Donahue as a meteor in the blank heavens, but to the majority his conclusions were completely obscure. Pat knew enough to realize his father’s classification, and he concealed this knowledge in fear and shame. Conal was a highbrow. The boys would rag him like hell if they knew. Luckily no one now read his father’s books. They belonged to the years before he’d met Mum—the dull old twenties.

Yet for the shame there was also a balance of pride. Conal had fought in the 1914–1918 war, and his service had not been undistinguished. He’d been one of the original Anzacs—yes,

sir, no kidding! He'd gone through the business as a ranker, declined the commission he might easily have had, stormed the blood-washed cliffs at Gallipoli, been decorated. That was the stuff Pat enjoyed hearing.

"Tell us how you got the D.C.M.," he would beg, when Anzac Day came round. "Then I can give the kids the low-down on why my dad's a blinkin' hero."

"Every man on Gallipoli was a blinking hero," was the reply he'd get to this. "I didn't deserve a medal—any more than the fellow next to me."

"That why you never wear it?" Pat asked with discernment.

He saw on his father's face an expression both sombre and defiant, with pity for his dead comrades and anger that the battle they had fought so well was still unfinished and even now being fought again—for Pat was growing up during another war.

"That's why I never wear it," he answered. "You can have it if you like."

"Oh, can I really! Thanks a lot. I'll make all the jokers sit up and take notice that my dad's a hero."

"No, you won't." For once Conal spoke sharply to his son. "Don't try to impress people—it's poor and silly. Besides, your dad's not a hero. He was scared stiff all the time. That's a mean sort of a hero, isn't it?"

His pale eyes burnt wrathfully, as they did when he exposed greed, dishonesty, hypocrisy. He would destroy Pat's image of the hero. Why? Because he disdained a pedestal, and preferred humanity to the saints.

But Pat was not dismayed. From his own experience he had learnt that heroes can be scared stiff. . . .

"They must have thought you were pretty good," he maintained, "or they wouldn't have given you the D.C.M."

XI

Julie saw, and fought against seeing, the link which joined her husband and her son, and parted her. It was her tragedy

that she must labour both for Conal and for Pat, and yet be outside their union. This man's friendship left her, a woman, on the cold rocks of an alien shore.

She had therefore to find a substitute—and she found it among her guests; her male guests, for most of the inmates of Eastridge were of the sex opposite to Julie's.

It was, among them, a clear but unstated fact that a flirtation with Mrs. Donahue was definitely in order—more even than that, expected. The point that many misunderstood was the length to which the flirtation might be carried. One luckless young man, a journalist called Harry West, who had erroneously supposed that Mrs. Donahue's virtue was not too highly-prized a possession, had been speedily disillusioned and ejected from Eastridge with no uncertain haste, so that his example was a salutary reminder to any one who might feel inclined to misinterpret Julie's apparent friendliness.

Conal watched the favourites come and go with a slight smile. He knew well enough that nothing of real warmth lay behind the friendliness: he knew the hard, impregnable streak which offered more than it was willing, or even able, to bestow. Because of it, he'd felt genuinely sorry for Harry West, and had taken him out and given him a drink, as a sign that there existed no ill-will between them. The two of them got very drunk together, and Julie had been quite disgusted with them both. It was after this that Harry West had been compelled to find lodgings elsewhere, although Conal had championed him with what, Julie felt in the circumstances, was indecent partiality.

What Conal did not know was the bitterness of the disappointment Julie had suffered, as a result of the marriage which had promised her so much security, prestige and worldly advancement. She had hoped to better her lot—and she had had to work harder than ever before in her life. For that she could not forgive Conal any more than she could forgive him her loneliness and despair. Yet she could not be unfaithful to him—and it was not only the impregnable streak. As a virgin of twenty she had given him everything she had to give: it was that which bound her to him, that, and the son she had borne him.

Harry West's successor, a stock-broker and ardent racing man,

offered her gifts, attention, flattery : he took her to the races, which she adored. His name, imposingly, was Alfred de Courcy Traynor.

XII

As a member of Tiger Weatherall's gang, Pat was having the time of his life. Their deeds (or misdeeds) became the talk of the district. There were few things they didn't dare. War was declared on law and order.

When summer came they would go down to the river to swim, and passers-by were rendered speechless with horror to see them diving from the railing of the high bridge. Near Richmond the Yarra was not an ideal swimming pool, for various drains emptied their contents in to its sluggish, muddy course ; but Pat and his friends found it all that could be desired.

As the summer wore on, however, this pastime palled, and they became aware of the fact that on the south side of the river, where the old homes sat snugly in their gardens, the fruit trees were bearing their yearly crop of apricots and peaches. The mere thought of so much edible richness was temptation enough, and when temptation beckoned action was not slow in following.

"Them snobs have got more than they need," Tiger declared, as they sat in their bathing trunks on the river bank one golden afternoon in February. "The bloomin' fruit just rots on the trees, and falls off without anybody having it. It's the meanest thing I ever knew. Rather have it fall off, they would, than let us get a hand on it."

"In Russia they'd have to share it," Pat said, recalling an utterance of Conal's. "Everything's shared there. All property's held in common. No blasted capitalists to put it over the proletariat."

"What's that—proletariat ?"

"It means the people—blokes like you and me. They have a fair go in Russia."

"Well, we can act being Russians, can't we ? Let's go."

They went. Wooden palings were not sufficient obstacles to keep out these devotees of a better order. While Curly Matthews kept watch, they scaled the fences and swung themselves into the leafy branches of the gnarled trees which had borne fruit for seasons without number. Cautiously, but with method, they helped themselves to as much as they could carry, ready to leap to the ground at the least alarm. The inhabitants of the large houses gave no sign of their existence, the few pedestrians passed with no more than a curious look, disclaiming any responsibility. Only at one house were they surprised. A small, fair-haired boy of about six years espied them from his garden as they climbed his tree, and gave a shrill scream.

"Oh, you bad boys! Get down! You're stealing our fruit."

"Keep your whiskers on, sonny," smiled Tiger, recovering from the first prick of alarm the loud exclamation had given him. "We ain't taking more than you can spare."

"But you're stealing. It's wrong. My Mummy'll ring up the police. And then you'll all be put in prison."

"Not so much of the stealing, kid. We're only picking enough to keep us from starvin'."

"Are you as hungry as all that?" The boy opened wide a large pair of innocent brown eyes.

"Too right. We ain't seen any food in weeks," Tiger began, but Pat spoilt his romancing by saying:

"Quit whining to the little bastard. We got a right to take our share . . . See here, kid—this is a free country. What's yours is mine, and what's mine is yours. See?"

But Arthur Pettigrew didn't see, and what was more he took exception to Pat's tone.

"You're thieves, that's what you are. Even if you are hungry you don't have to steal. You can come up to our door, and ask for bread, can't you?" Then, raising his voice, he shrieked with all the strength of a remarkably fine pair of lungs: "Mummy, mummy! There are boys stealing our fruit!"

An answering call was heard which suggested that young Arthur's strong lungs were hereditary—at least, on the maternal side—and his mamma appeared on the veranda.

"That's put the lid on it. We got business some place else,"

said Tiger, leaping to the fence, and from there slithering to the footpath. "Beat it!" he shouted to the others.

As they ran up the quiet side street in which the Pettigrew's house was situated they heard Arthur's mother call after them:

"I'll get the police. I'm going in now to phone them. They'll be here in no time."

They had all been threatened with the police on occasions so many and varied that none of them was much impressed. Talk of the police meant no more to them than the early threats of their mothers: "I'll spank you if you don't come on." "If you do that again I'll tell your father." "Stop it—or I'll make you." Seldom were policemen in evidence, and if one should ever come into view they were always engaged in innocuous pastimes, and wearing expressions of angelic purity.

Now on the bank they quickly disposed of their sweet and hardly-won refreshment, while they drew up plans for future campaigns in the enemy's territory.

"It's wicked to waste such bonzer fruit," said Tiger. "Old Pa Pattigrew's got the best trees in South Yarra. We'll try 'em again to-morrow. As it's Sunday they'll all be saying their prayers."

"Will that little tick of theirs be saying his—that's more to the point," Jem Watson suggested.

"'Course he will. That type always does. Goody-goody. Sissy. Believes in God. Obeys his mammy," Tiger responded scornfully.

His surmises proved correct. While the Pettigrews attended the morning service on the following day the boys from north of the Yarra helped themselves to their fruit without hindrance, and proceeded to overeat themselves in consequence, so that Curly Matthews and Bill Turner were absent from school on Monday morning. The others, being made of sterner stuff, teased them unmercifully when they returned.

"The gang don't want no weak-bellied saps," Tiger told them. "If you're going to puke after a few peaches you're no good to us. Savvy?"

"Fair go, Tige," Curly expostulated. "They wasn't properly ripe. And don't forget I kept guard for you. Dangerous job, that."

"Soft job, you mean. Softest in the whole damned show.

You didn't have to climb no trees, and so you could make a getaway ahead of us all. Dangerous job! Like hell it was."

"Oh, shut up, Tige, Curly's O.K.," Hadley interposed. "He won't let us down again."

"He'd better not then." But Tiger showed signs of relenting.

The case of Curly Matthews was one to be pitied, for of all the gang his private life was the most complicated. His father had disappeared, his mother drank, while his elder sister Emmy had run away with a sailor. Later the luckless girl had returned home, plus a baby, but minus a wedding ring—and minus the sailor. It was only to be expected that the boys often whistled "A Life on the Ocean Wave" and "Every Nice Girl Loves a Sailor" and danced a horn-pipe in Curly's presence. In the same way they had sung "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" for Pat's benefit—until they found it wasn't worth it. With Curly, however, it was worth it, for obviously he took it to heart. So when they were hard up for an occupation they told anecdotes of the marine life. But in a surreptitious way they were all rather sorry for Curly.

The drama of Emmy Matthews and the unexpected infant were also subjects for endless discussion. It was in connection with this event that Pat had gained most of the information he required to "help him take his place in the world as a man," as Tiger expressed it. Tiger, Hadley Rowe and Jem Watson had felt it incumbent on them to fill in certain discrepancies in Pat's general education. They set about it with such a will that by the time they had finished with him there wasn't much more for him to know. When Conal began to instruct him on similar lines some time later he found that he'd been forestalled—and roughly forestalled: but that was the price one paid to be a member of the gang, and Pat paid it willingly, with both hands.

XIII

The week-ends were now given over to forays after fruit, which, organized with Tiger's usual efficiency, were nearly always

rewarded with success. They grew more and more reckless, crossing people's gardens in search for other trees, treading down plants and breaking fences, not to mention scaring little Arthur Pettigrew and his kind out of their wits.

At last the easy-going inhabitants of these regions began to take notice. One day when the gang was engaged in robbing the trees on the Pettigrew estate, the son and heir trotted out importantly.

"Daddy told the police about you larrikins. They're coming to catch you. So you'd better look out!"

"Look out yourself," replied Tiger who was tired of being browbeaten by a six-year-old. "We aint' scared of cops. Cops and us are coppers. Ain't we, gang?"

"I'll say we are," Hadley responded. "For myself I'd as soon see a cop as any other man . . . fifty yards away," he added.

"See here, young un," said Tiger, whose head was as full of schemes as the tree in which he sat was of peaches, "how'd you like to join our gang?"

His mates looked at him in consternation.

"Go easy, Tige—you can't have a booby in our set-up," Hadley expostulated, while Pat added:

"Specially when his old man's a bloomin' snob."

"You don't get me," Tiger said in a loud whisper. "If he's in with us he can play watch-dog. What d'ye say, kid? Like to join?"

"Don't give him no choice," interposed Hadley, who knew more about gangster methods. "Tell him he's got to join—or else."

"Or else—what?" cried Arthur, finding something sinister in Hadley's words.

"Or else we'll slit your pretty little gullet for you," and Hadley made a suggestive motion.

"No! No! I'll scream. Don't touch me—I'll scream if you do!"

"No you won't."

Hadley leapt lightly from the peach tree on to the Pettigrew's lawn, and catching hold of Arthur's arms from behind, prevented him by a firm grip, from getting away. A look of white terror

filled the captive's face at the unexpectedness of this, and the threat it implied. Hadley was not a bully and he didn't mean to hurt unduly, but his size and strength were enough to inspire a dread which prevented Arthur from employing his vocal powers and even from putting up a struggle.

At this moment Curly's shrill whistle heralded danger. Micky Timms interpreted its peculiar quality in one word :

"Cops !"

Hadley let go of Arthur and was over the fence, all inside a minute : Jem and Bill were half-way up the street and Curly was already out of sight, while Micky leapt to the pavement, just as two policemen, one fat and the other thin, turned the corner.

"Step on it, Tige—here they come," were Micky's parting word's as he pelted off in the wake of the others.

Suddenly the air was rent by piercing screams, and cries of :

"Mummy ! The larrakins are hurting me ! The larrakins are killing me ! Help, Mummy, help !"

"Wish we had cut his gullet, after all," Tiger said vengefully, to Pat, as they scrambled down the tree. Having climbed higher than the others they were longer in reaching the ground ; but, at last, Tiger's feet found the pavement. Pat was about to follow, when he saw that the two policemen had taken up positions between Tiger and himself on the one hand, and safety on the other. The street being a blind one there was only one exit, and that was now blocked. The other boys had disappeared.

"Look out, Tige," he whispered, retreating into the shelter of the foliage.

"Not me. I'm going to make a run for it." And he set off at a smart pace in the direction of the on-coming figures, but wide of them.

They, however, had advanced more quickly than Tiger had anticipated, and Pat, leaning precariously from his perch, saw the fat policeman move with a speed surprising for one of his build, and intercept him : his lean associate closed in from the rear—and Tiger, leader of the gang was a prisoner.

Pat retired into the friendly branches of the peach tree, and climbed higher than was strictly commensurable with safety

in an endeavour to conceal himself. There, feeling like Charles the Second, he waited for events to shape themselves, the while he peered cautiously from behind his leafy curtain.

The first happening was the arrival of Mrs. Pettigrew, who came running on anxious feet to rescue her offspring from the assaults of his brutal aggressors. Arthur proceeded to give his mother a highly-coloured account of the way he'd been attacked and nearly killed, to which his fond mamma listened with dismay and horror, and promised her son that vengeance would be swift and certain.

"Little liar," Pat said to himself as he listened, "cutting his throat's too good for him."

During the recital the two policemen entered the garden with Tiger, looking very disconsolate, between them. Mrs. Pettigrew fell on them with wrathful zest, and repeated to them Arthur's story, demanding that justice should be done. The fat policeman made a note of her charges, and then began to question Arthur.

"What happened, son? What did the boys do to you?"

"They caught me, and twisted my arms, and tried to kill me," Arthur explained, all in one breath.

The thin policeman laughed.

"Better put down attempted murder, Joe," he suggested.

Mrs. Pettigrew turned on him.

"It's nothing to laugh about. The child's been badly frightened."

"How many boys were there?" the questioner continued.

"Oh, a great many—twelve or fourteen."

"Can you count up to six, son? Because only five kids sprinted past us—and this one makes six . . . What did the twelve or fourteen boys do to you?"

"I told you. They twisted my arms and tried to kill me."

"Twisting your arms wouldn't kill you. How many actually touched you?"

"Oh, a lot of them!"

"It's a lie!" broke in Tiger. "I never touched you, you little——"

"Now, now, easy does it," interposed the policeman. "You'll

have your turn later. How many of the boys touched you, young man? try to remember. Was it ten—or six or four?"

"I—I think it was only one," Arthur faltered,
The thin policeman laughed.

"Only one? All this fuss about one boy twisting your arm——"

"There's much more to it than that," cried Mrs. Pettigrew.
"These dreadful boys come here regularly to steal our fruit. They break our fences, spoil our gardens—not to mention terrorizing our children—and you say it's nothing. Well, let me tell you you haven't heard the last from me. I'll get my husband to take it to a higher authority. This annoyance has got to stop, even if it means appealing to the Chief Commissioner of Police."

"Now, Mrs. Pettigrew, don't you worry," said the fat policeman calmly, although his confederate looked alarmed. "We'll see you won't be worried again. We've got one of the boys, and we'll soon find the others."

"Well, I only hope you will. What's the police force for—if it's not to protect decent people? That's why we pay our taxes—to have our rights maintained . . . Come along inside, Arthur, and lie down, you poor little fellow. . . . Good afternoon, Constable." And she went away only half appeased holding her young son firmly by the hand.

And now Pat, who was beginning to tire of his cramped position, had to listen to Tiger's cross-examination. The fat policeman began by asking his name and address, which he reluctantly gave.

"Names of your pals?" the policeman continued, and the question made Pat realize suddenly that this wasn't going to be at all nice.

"I won't tell you that."

"Oh, come on, son. We won't do 'em any harm. Just give them a warning, like." Pat noticed that there was little difference between the way he spoke to Arthur Pettigrew and the way he spoke to Tiger.

"I won't tell."

"How many were there, then?"

"Six."

"And they all got away?"

"Yes."

Pat wondered if Tiger had forgotten that he had not gone with the others. Not once had he looked up into the tree where Pat was hidden, but that possibly was because he was anxious not to betray his whereabouts.

"Do you often come over here to take people's fruit?"

"Sometimes."

"Same boys come with you?"

"Yes."

"Sort of gang you've got together?"

"Sort of."

"And did you touch young Pettigrew?"

"No."

"Did one of the others?"

"I—I don't know."

"Think again. Did one of the other boys twist his arms?"

"Yes."

"Which one was it?"

"I won't tell you."

"Look here, sonny, we ain't got all day. It may not seem much to you pinching fruit and bullying youngsters. But we can't let it go on. People won't stand for that sort of thing, and we're here to stop it. Besides, it leads to something worse. If we let you get away with taking fruit and trespassing on other people's property, you'd probably go on to house-breaking and robbery. See what I mean? I'll have to go and see your father about you."

"Oh, please, mister, don't do that! My dad'll wallop me like fury. He's a hard man, my dad is. Please don't tell him."

Pat could hardly recognize the voice as Tiger's. It was humble and beseeching, not at all the way the self-possessed leader of the gang usually spoke. But perhaps Tiger was putting on an act; he was good at that—never at a loss; that was how he'd won his proud nickname.

"I'll promise I'll never take fruit again, if you'll only say you won't tell my dad. Oh, please, mister—please don't!"

It began to dawn on Pat that Tiger wasn't pretending. That was the voice of abject fear. Tiger was almost snivelling. It

was certain that he'd forgotten about Pat's being in the tree. He would never have gone on like this before a member of the gang.

There followed a painful interlude in which Tiger, all his toughness gone, pleaded unashamedly with the fat policeman to keep his misdoings a secret from his father. Pat, his cheeks burning as he listened, felt himself enveloped in Tiger's shame. It seemed to him horrible that he should be made aware of another's fear; especially when that other was the cocky, vain Tiger, who kept the gang in hand, and the neighbours in a constant state of apprehension. He felt he had no right to listen, but he couldn't go.

He knew Mr. Weatherall was a stern, unlovable man, and it was not Tiger's fear of him that disgusted Pat. He himself knew what it was to be afraid. He pretended to others—but he didn't pretend to himself. In his heart he knew he was no braver than the next fellow. No, he was not braver, but no one could ever know when he was afraid—if he didn't let them.

That was the trouble with Tiger. He was betraying the fact that he was afraid. Pat found it unforgivable.

In Tiger's place he would have been frightened—but he would have given the policemen all the cheeky answers he could think up. He would have invented. He would have improvised. They wouldn't have been permitted to know when they were scoring against him. . . . But here was Tiger, the resourceful, the brilliant, whom Pat had admired and made his hero, cowed and helpless, exhibiting his fear.

By this time his leader had sunk so low in his estimation that he was hardly surprised when the policeman, by clever questioning, drew from Tiger the names of the gang-members. But each name was a nail in Tiger's coffin.

"Hadley Rowe. Jeremy Watson. Frank Matthews. Michael Timms. Bill Turner. Patrick Donahue."

"All right son. Better to get it off your chest. And now we'll go your way together."

This, Pat supposed from his experiences of American films, was done so that Tiger couldn't get into communication with his friends, and give them warning.

After a long period of silence, he climbed carefully from the

branch where he had crouched for nearly an hour, and, seeing nobody about, descended to the fence, and from there to the ground.

He was stiff and sore, his feet pricked with pins and needles, and he felt a little sick. He knew he'd have to tell the gang about Tiger's defection, and he was going to hate it.

Slowly he walked up the street. He met no one. There was not a sign of Tiger or the two policemen. He went in search of the gang.

XIV

He found them, where he had expected, on the bank of the river but further up from the spot where they usually sat after they'd been swimming. They were immensely glad to see him.

"Hullo, Pat."

"You escaped, I see."

"Where's Tiger? What happened?"

He sat down beside them.

"Cops have caught Tiger."

They all looked incredulous.

"You don't say! Caught Tiger! Fancy old Tiger letting himself get caught! The old boy's losing his cunning. . . ."

"Where is he now?" Hadley asked.

"Cops have got him."

"Are they taking him to the lock-up?" inquired Curly in an awed whisper.

"Don't know. I suppose so." Pat lay down on his stomach, and idly pulled at the grass.

"Where were you?" asked Hadley.

"In the tree."

"All the time?"

"Yes. They came before I could get down. So I stopped up there."

"That was pretty smart of you," said Jem Watson admiringly, "and they didn't spot you?"

"Would I be here if they had, stupid?"

"You were there all the time," said Hadley slowly. "Then you must have heard what they said to Tige. . . . And what he said to them," he added.

"Must have been fun," said Micky laughing. "Wish I'd been there. Fancy if they'd looked up! You sure have guts, St. Patrick."

But Hadley was occupied with a different thought, inspired by Pat's taciturnity. Brusquely he broke through the chorus of amused approbation.

"Out with it! They asked him for our names, didn't they?" Pat admitted it.

"And he—split on us?"

"Oh, no, Tiger wouldn't," Micky protested. "Not old Tige. . . ."

"He'd never do such a thing," Curly agreed.

But Pat maintained silence . . . and silence can be as merciless as any speech.

"So he did." Hadley's short comment came as a relief.

"He's scared of his old man," said Curly trying to find an excuse for the fallen hero.

"It won't help him. They're going to tell his old man anyway," Pat replied, and was cut short by a sudden, violent outburst by Hadley:

"Damn him! He's a bloody sneak. I'd never have let them get it out of me—never, never. I'd have died first."

Pat, with visions of the rack and Guy Fawkes, felt himself profoundly in accord with this sentiment.

They sat for a long time without speaking, each occupied with his own thoughts, which were doubly unhappy ones. For all they knew they might return home to find members of the police force waiting to arrest them and bear them away to goal—while their betrayal by their leader added what they felt was undeserved bitterness to the situation.

Pat had not given them a full account of what he'd overheard. He hadn't described Tiger's abasement, which he felt disgraced the whole gang. They thought, and he let them think, that Tiger in a mood of self-assertion and bravado—a mood they

knew—had revealed their names. The mood Pat had discovered was unknown to their experience of Tiger. He left it at that. Things were bad enough. There was no need to wallow in unpalatable details. Besides, Pat was not without his loyalties.

"By this time to-morrow we'll probably all be in the cooler," said Bill with melancholy cheerfulness.

"Well, we won't have to do lessons," replied Jem. "It'll be a rest in a way."

"I don't know so much about that. There's hard labour," said Curly mournfully. "I've often heard of blokes getting six months with hard."

"Not kids, I shouldn't think," answered Hadley. "They'll be more likely to send us to a reformatory."

"That'd be better than the lock-up." And Curly revived a little immediately to be downcast again when Hadley said:

"They work you hard there. And it's damned cold."

"Fancy Tiger getting us into this." Jem returned to it again. "Of all people, I'd have said Tiger was the last to split on a clobber."

"Oh, shut up about Tiger, will you?" Pat exclaimed fiercely. "I'm sick and tired of it."

"Give him a cigarette, Jem," Hadley ordered. "We'll have one all round. Buck us up."

Jem produced a packet of cigarettes, the greatest satisfaction of their lives, and they all took one, except Pat.

"Don't smoke," he explained off-handedly. He'd got out of it before without attracting attention, but now they stared at him.

"You don't say! What's eatin' you?" Jem inquired.

"I don't smoke. I never will. Or drink either. And I'm not a sissy, see? If any bloke says I'm a sissy he can stand up and take what I deal out. See?" His tone couldn't have been more belligerent. Subconsciously he had realized the truth of the assertion; when in a weak position—attack.

"O.K. Simmer down." Jem laughed uneasily. He wasn't going to start a fight with the boy who'd knocked out the gang's erstwhile champion.

"Yes, keep your wool on, Pat," Hadley agreed. "No one's

insinuatins' anything. We know you're not a girl. We seen you stripped too often to make any mistake." And he launched into an unnecessarily detailed description of what Pat looked like stripped, which was greeted with the sort of loud laughter with which the boys treated anything which approached the salacious. None laughed louder than Pat himself, who took Hadley's robust vulgarity as a compliment to his manhood.

For him smoking went with drinking, and drinking was leading his father down and down. He loathed them both. He loathed the smell of drink and the smell of stale and discarded ash. There were times when he loathed his father because he smelt of both. By association they had become one. Even for the gang's approval he couldn't adopt what he secretly condemned. He felt, somehow, that it would be wrong to do so. He wanted the gang's respect, but not at that price.

Of course it was nobody's business, and he wasn't going to offer explanations. But they ought to know it wasn't because he wasn't a sissy that he refused. It was very much their business to know that. . . .

The others smoked their cigarettes, but for once they found small comfort in them. It was growing dark. A cold wind had sprung up, which passed across the sluggish water and broke the reflections of the newly-lighted street lamps into wavering distortions: above, a mass of black clouds blotted out the stars. Now and then a distant fork of lightning tore its ragged course across the sky.

"Stop shivering, Curly," Hadley commanded suddenly. "I can hear your beastly teeth chattering, and it gives me the jim-jams."

"You gettin' the wind up, Curly?" asked Micky unpleasantly.

"No, I ain't. But it's cold here."

"Well, we can't go home. They'll nab us if we do."

"We can't stay here for ever," Pat contributed practically.

"It seems to me we ought to send out a spy to do some scouting."

"I'll go." Jem Watson, glad of a chance for action, got to his feet with alacrity. "I'll get hold of Violet and send her round to Tiger's house to see what's doing. She's a sensible kid, and knows how to keep her mouth shut."

"Never yet met a woman who did," Hadley answered cynically, adding: "We don't want no girls mixed up in our affairs."

"She won't get mixed up. She'll just do what I tell her, and won't ask no questions."

"Don't trust any of 'em."

But Jem, who was bent on distinguishing himself and his family, answered quickly:

"She'll do anything for Pat."

At that they laughed uproariously, but this time Pat did not laugh with them.

"Oh, we all know what Irish eyes do to the ladies," Hadley said, while Micky added:

"Why don't you give her a break, St. Patrick? She'd do all our scouting then."

"Like hell she would!" Pat sat up. "I agree with Had, we don't want no damned sheila mucking up our show."

"She's dinkum, I tell you." Jem had to repel any insult to a member of the Watson clan, but he was beginning to wish he'd never mentioned Violet's name.

"Tell you what," Hadley said. "You cut along and get hold of your sister. Tell her to go across to Weatherall's and see how things look over there. She can say she's come to ask after Ma Weatherall's rheumatism or something. She could also look in at my place, and Donahue's . . . won't have time for all. When she's got the low-down, tell her to come and make her report to the gang—proper like." After further instruction Jem, feeling that even a brush with the police was preferable to the dreadful inaction which was fast destroying the gang's morale, sped off.

"Only hope it'll work," Hadley commented lighting another cigarette. "Don't like girls in things. Always leads to trouble."

"Oh, Vi won't do us any harm," said Micky easily. "She's so smitten with Pat she's not likely to double-cross us."

"Useful sort of cove to have around—St. Patrick," Bill Turner agreed. "Them blue eyes burn the girls up."

"Like your nose bashed in?" Pat asked him. "And your jaw dislocated? And your teeth knocked out?"

"Go easy, I ain't done nothing," Bill answered sulkily.

"Then keep off my eyes. Besides they're not blue. They're grey."

"O.K. They're red if you like."

The time went on, heavy, monotonous, weighing on their spirits and preventing them from rising from the depths of depression into which they had fallen. It was now quite dark; the lightning was advancing and there was some thunder. Curly's teeth were not the only ones chattering.

At last Jem came back—with his sister.

"Tiger's home," Jem burst out. "Vi went to his place as you told her, and she says his old man is givin' him a hidin', 'cos she heard him yelling. And Ma Weatherall wouldn't open the door. . . ."

"Let Violet tell us. That's what she's here for," interrupted Hadley. "Any cops at Weatherall's?"

"Not as I could see. They might have been there though. Anyhow one came to our place and talked to Mum."

Jem groaned. "There you are. They been around. They didn't waste no time."

"What did the cop say to your mother?" Hadley was conducting the cross-examination, while the others hung on question and answer with suspended breath.

"I don't know. I listened at the keyhole, but I didn't hear nothing. Soon after he went Jem called me at the window, and I went out to see what he wanted."

"The cop really went away?" Jem wanted to know. "He's not waiting to run me in?"

"No. I saw him go . . . But why should he run you in? What have you done?"

"Don't you start asking questions," Hadley reproved her sternly. "You answer them—then you scoot. Savvy? Now, you were also ordered to go to my place and Pat's. What did you find out there?"

"Your house was locked up—your dad and mum hadn't come home. I didn't see no cops there or at Pat's place either. Of course they might have been and gone away again. Pat's mother came to the door at his place, and when I peeped in I didn't see no one except one of the lodgers."

"Which one?" Pat inquired.

"The smart gentleman—what backs horses. Mr. Traynor, isn't he? He gave me a bob. He'd probably had a win at the races."

Pat snorted. Mr. Traynor was always too much in evidence for his liking. "What did Mum say?" he asked Violet.

"Well, nothing much. Nothing to do with this—er—trouble—you boys are in."

"Who says we're in trouble?"

"Well, ain't you? Why are there coppers about—and you hiding?"

"We're not hiding," Hadley said loftily. "We just find it nice and fresh down here by the river. And you're not to ask questions. Now answer the one Pat asked you. What did Mrs. Donahue say?"

Violet's disinclination to reveal what Pat's mother had said caught their interest. Reluctantly Violet was forced to appease it.

"She said; 'It's no good you running after Pat. He don't like girls. Better get another boy.' She thought I was looking for Pat—see? And then Mr. Traynor said; 'Bad luck, lassie. Try again in ten years time.' " Violet spoke defiantly, and looked across to where she knew Pat was sitting, but it was too dark to see his face.

The boys laughed.

"What did he mean—try again in ten years' time?" Curly asked.

"You little innocent," Hadley chuckled. "I can see I'll have to take you in hand and open your eyes a bit. He meant that Pat was too young for girls. Got to get to a certain age, see?"

"Nothing to do with it," Pat retorted indignantly. "I'll never like girls." He felt that Violet's presence made a fool of him: he wished Jem hadn't dragged her in: all he wanted to do was to hurt her feelings as he'd done once before—send her off in tears and establish once and for all for the gang's benefit his ruthless power. "What are you waiting for?" he asked her brutally. "Time for you to scoot. You've made your report. Now beat it!"

To his immense satisfaction she rose and meekly obeyed him. Well the gang should notice that !

" God ! how barmy girls are ! " Hadley exclaimed, impressed against himself by the display. " Mooning around after Pat—and he treats her like dirt. . . . Why don't you bring her up better, Jem ? "

" I done my best. " Seeing that opinion generally was against him Jem unworthily stopped taking her part, and went over to the opposition. " She's just plain silly. Never stops about how wonderful Pat is. I try to tell her that's hooey. He's no more wonderful than the rest of us. "

But that was scarcely satisfactory . . . " You needn't tell her I'm not wonderful. She can at least have her own idea of me, " said Pat. He stood up. " Come on, " he said, as if the tussle with Violet had revived him. " We'll face the music. Perhaps the cops have gone. "

Apparently grateful for the lead, they followed suit : the outlook was bleak, but a night spent on the river bank, probably in the rain, would hardly improve it. Without a word they solemnly traversed the streets and, at last with melancholy good-byes, they separated, and went each on his lonely way to his own roof-tree.

XV

Pat opened the gate of Eastridge with trepidation. He did not know, could scarcely imagine, the fate which might there befall him. Policemen might be hidden in the house, his parents might have been put on their honour to hand him over as soon as he returned. There was no end to the painful suppositions, and it was small comfort to reflect that the others must be feeling exactly as he did.

When he entered the kitchen, he found that dinner was over and the interminable washing up nearly completed. His mother didn't scold him for being late, as on any occasion she would most certainly have done, but merely brought him his meal which she

had been keeping hot in the oven. She didn't even ask him where he'd been, which was to say the least of it extraordinary, and he was allowed to eat his dinner in peace, while she chatted with Doreen. In spite of his forebodings, Pat ate a good meal, for he was ravenous.

When he had finished and was about to rise from the table, Conal came in.

"Hullo, Pat. How was the fruit?" he asked in quite an ordinary voice, as he might say "Have some more pudding?"

"What fruit?" That was to gain time.

"You know very well what fruit. We heard about it from a policeman who called before dinner. He told us——"

"You can go, Doreen," Julie broke in, concerned, as always, with externals. Then they all waited while Doreen, torn with unsatisfied curiosity, left the room.

When the door had closed after her, Conal repeated; "Yes. We've had a visit from one of the minions of the law." Leaning against the table, he began to roll one of his eternal cigarettes.

"Fat or thin?" Pat asked.

"What does that matter?" Julie demanded, but Conal saw fit to answer Pat's question, rather than hers.

"Fat. Very fat. The buttons of his coat were nearly popping under the strain."

"You would make a joke of it. I can't see anything amusing about our son getting involved with the police."

"Now, dear . . ." Conal looked at her under the weary lids of his peculiarly pale eyes, "you said you'd let me handle this."

"All right. But I hope you're going to thrash him."

"I most certainly am not. I've never laid my hands on him."

"No. And that's why he's turned out so badly. You've spoilt him. Remember about Solomon. Spare the rod——"

"I don't hold with all the Old Testament prescribes, not by any means. Besides Solomon's morals were none too sound . . . I prefer Christian standards. Charity. Love. . . . Can you imagine Christ thrashing His son . . . if He'd had one?"

But he only succeeded in shocking Julie and embarrassing Pat. Conal had a disconcerting habit of bringing God and

Christ into the conversation, not by way of an oath which was forgivable, even more, admirable—but as if the Deity were in the next room, almost as if He were one of the lodgers. To Pat it seemed ridiculous, especially as Conal was not religious in the accepted sense. He never went inside a church, he waged continual warfare with old Miss Sagood, a staunch believer, about the articles of faith and observance in general. Her main cause of anger with him was over the fact that Pat had never been baptized, nor accepted into any denomination: she declared the boy was being denied the right to spiritual consolation. Pat, profoundly indifferent to the subject, was only grateful to Conal for sparing him the boredom of church-going, which, anyway, must have meant excommunication from the gang. But why, after displaying so much good sense, must his father drag in these untimely references to Christ?

It had obviously been prearranged between his parents that Conal was to “deal” with Pat’s latest misdemeanour. How they had reached agreement over so controversial a matter Pat could not imagine, for Julie had little hope of Conal’s ever taking a firm stand in the name of authority, but an inclination of her husband’s head in the direction of the door was apparently a reminder to her to withdraw; and she turned away.

“If you’d only made him promise not to have anything to do with that Tiger Weatherall this would never have happened.”

“You needn’t worry about Tiger, Mum,” Pat consoled her, and he added fiercely: “I’ve done with him—for good and all.”

His mother turned swiftly on the threshold:

“Oh, darling! And you’ll give up the others, too, won’t you?”

But that was asking too much. “No. I can’t.”

“Can’t! You mean won’t . . . You won’t do one little thing for your poor mother.” Her voice quivered.

Conal crossed the room to her side.

“Leave it to me,” he said quietly, his hand on the door.

“Leave it to you! You won’t do anything.” But she went out, and closed the door after her.

“Your mother’s very upset, Pat,” he said, as he returned to the table. “She cried when the policeman told us about

your taking people's fruit and making yourself a nuisance."

"Women's tears don't mean a thing," said Pat in faithful imitation of Hadley, but he began to feel uncomfortable and to wish that the interview was over.

"That's not a kind remark."

"I don't feel particularly kind just now."

"No. I don't suppose you do. We'll leave that," said Conal reasonably, and after a slight pause he started on a different line: "You said you'd finished with Tiger. I presume he went the way of all flesh?"

"It's a secret—about Tiger."

"Of course it is. I'm not asking you to tell me anything you don't want to."

Conal had a dread of using third-degree methods, and had trained himself not to inquire into other people's affairs. Especially was he punctilious over this with his son. But he had promised to deal with him somehow. . . . To while away the break in the conversation, he began work on another cigarette, while Pat waited. They were both a little constrained, owing to a certain amount of shyness, which Pat, under a show of impudence and daring, hid more successfully than Conal.

"What did the cop say?" Pat asked at length, seeing that if he didn't take the lead Conal's lecture would be on the rocks.

"He told us that you and the others are causing a lot of trouble stealing fruit, smashing fences, molesting children. . . . And he asked us to warn you to stop."

"What'll they do to us, Conal?" After all, it was a relief to hear—even the truth, from someone (well, he'd admit it!) who was older and wiser than he was.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No, not this time. You get off with a warning. Next time, however, it would be regarded as an offence, and you'd be liable to be indicted."

"What's that mean?"

"Oh, you'd have to appear in court, and you'd be charged, and if you were found guilty—you might be sent away."

"To gaol?"

"No. To a special school where boys go to learn how to be social beings. . . . I don't think it's likely to happen though."

"Why not?"

"Because you won't do that sort of thing again."

"What makes you think we won't?"

"You'll see it's not worth it. You don't want to walk into trouble. They'd be on the look out—and you wouldn't get off so easily another time. Besides, it wouldn't be much fun taking fruit after this."

"Why wouldn't it be?"

Conal threw the moist stub of his cigarette onto the stove. "Because it never is. You can't go back to things as they were before. Something happens—and then it's not like it used to be ever again."

Pat considered this. He felt he wouldn't be surprised if his father were right: he didn't feel a bit inclined to steal fruit any more—at least, not for a long, long time.

"It was fun while it lasted," he said, half in protest, half convinced.

"Yes. It's fun while it lasts," Conal agreed. . . .

There didn't seem to be any more to say. Pat moved towards the door. He'd had a tremendous let off, and had even been spared the usual scene with his mother. It was more than he'd had any right to hope for. He wondered if the others had been as lucky.

XVI

The next day a very chastened Tiger attended school. None of the gang spoke to him. Hadley declared he'd have to be expelled from their select brotherhood.

"Of course, real gangsters'd bump off a squealer—but as we can't do that we'll just have to kid ourselves he's dead, and treat him according. The new boss can tell him where he gets off." Hadley was already taking unto himself the mantle of leadership, but Jem wasn't going to permit it.

"We ain't got no boss now. We got to choose one."

"Hadley's the eldest," said Curly. "besides he's been in the gang longer than most of us. I vote for Had."

"Pat knocked him out, don't forget," Jem retorted. "I vote for Pat."

"Keep it in the family, Jem. Someday Pat may be your brother-in-law," Micky jeered.

"Sister told him Pat's wonderful. And Jem believes it," Hadley suggested.

It was very nearly true. Sometimes Jem's dog-like devotion was as annoying as Violet's—but at other times it increased his confidence to know that in any discussion, any argument, with the gang, he could always count on Jem.

Formally they recorded their votes. When they came to be counted it was discovered that Pat had more than Hadley. They were doubtful how Hadley would take it. But Hadley rose splendidly to the occasion.

"I've played second so long it won't hurt me to go on for a bit longer," he said. "You're rather young, St. Patrick—but time'll fix that. When you want some advice don't forget to ask your Uncle Hadley. Take it away, son."

Pat, who would have taken defeat in a matter so vital with bad grace, was very impressed by Hadley's magnanimity. If anyone had cause to hold a grudge against him it was the boy he had beaten in combat.

At recess-time, the new leader and his first lieutenant marched up to a forlorn and woebegone Tiger, and the former, with a stony expression, delivered himself of the following pronouncement :

"Jack Weatherall. You have been found guilty of the crime of squealing to the cops. Therefore you must consider yourself expelled from the gang. And you hereby lose your name of Tiger."

"They got it out of me," Tiger whined. "I didn't mean to give you away. They tricked me."

"Don't forget I was in the tree," Pat reminded him, with the same set countenance, looking past him.

A look of horror suddenly grew in Tiger's eyes.

"Yes. You were in the tree, weren't you, Pat? I remember now." His voice was little more than a husky whisper. "Did—did you hear it all?"

"Every word."

There was a short, pregnant pause. Then: "Right about face," said Hadley, and Pat followed him.

"I reckon you had your money's worth in that tree," he said, being an observant boy.

"I could have done without it," Pat answered glumly. . . .

All the gang members had, it appeared, suffered thrashings from their fathers, and each was anxious to outdo the others in describing the ferocity of his chastisement. Therefore it was proposed by Hadley that they should bring ocular evidence to bear in deciding who had borne most; so in privacy they displayed, with some pride, the red marks on their persons. All, that is, except Pat, who refrained, not from modesty, but owing to the fact that he had nothing to show.

"Come on. What about you?" Hadley asked, seeing that he was making no attempt to follow their example. "Didn't you get a hidin'?"

"Too right I did. Worse than any of yours. You just couldn't bear to look at what I got," he replied promptly.

"Rats! Play fair, Pat."

"The boss does what he likes. He don't have to show off his behind if he don't want to," Jem declared, and luckily for Pat the rest agreed.

But he felt somehow that Hadley had been right, and he wasn't playing fair. He wished Conal had beaten him. He was taking advantage of being the boss to hide the fact that while they had taken physical punishment, he'd got off scot-free. The thought worried him all day.

That night he said to his father:

"I want you to give me a thrashing."

Conal was inclined to take it as a joke, but Pat was serious.

"I mean it. And give it to me hard—where it hurts most."

"What's all this about, Pat? Are you going in for sadism?"

"What's that?"

"The cult of inflicting pain for enjoyment. And it's counter-

part—having pain inflicted on you. Some people like to be door-mats, and have people beat them.”

“ I don’t know about wanting to be a door-mat. But I’d be glad if you’d give me a thrashing.”

“ For what offence ? ”

“ Stealing fruit.”

“ Pat—you haven’t done it again ? ”

“ No. Not since the cop came here.”

“ But why should you be punished for it now ? It’s over and done with.”

“ It’s not too late. Mum wanted you to thrash me. Didn’t she ? ”

Conal was completely at a loss. As a rule he saw instinctively behind Pat’s motives, but this was outside his knowledge.

“ I’ve never raised my hand against you in my life,” he said gravely. “ And, please God, I never will.”

“ All right,” Pat answered angrily. “ Don’t then.”

And there it ended.

XVII

After the conclusion of the fruit episode, Pat and his friends, seeking a less dangerous occupation for their leisure hours, developed a passion for the cinema. Hadley had always been an ardent “ fan ” and it was he who introduced the others to the thrilling fare turned out by the film studios so mercilessly to enthral the imaginations and stultify the minds of this generation.

Saturday afternoons found the gang in the front row of the stalls at the local picture palace—or, when funds permitted, more luxuriously housed in a city theatre. Always was it a point of honour with them to obtain seats in the front row. Long before the doors opened, they would take up positions at the head of the queue, and no subsequent comer was permitted to dispute their priority. Inside, their object attained, they sat craning their necks and damaging their eyesight, while the black and white shadows flickered across the screen.

The exploits of gangsters in the underworld were what they particularly liked ! warfare between rival gangs, shooting, villainy, hot pursuits over roof-tops, and as much bloodshed as possible.

Pat felt a cold, gripping excitement take possession of him as he watched. He was completely identified with the hero of the piece. As he had done with his story-books, so now he took an active part in the adventure portrayed : for him, while it lasted, it was entirely real.

When there was not a gangster film showing, they took the next best thing, the western. Here was action in plenty, shooting, and the fast pursuit, this time on horseback. It was not quite as fascinating as the gangster-world, but satisfactory enough. The love-interest, which must invariably be borne, they greeted with cat-calls and hisses, thus seriously annoying the more sedate patrons.

Julie, who loved going to the pictures herself, greeted Pat's new diversion with enthusiasm. She felt that no harm, no temptation, could come his way while thus employed. But Conal said a surprising thing.

" I'd rather have him robbing fruit trees."

" But it's so harmless," she protested.

He muttered something about : " . . . false values . . . false excitement . . . pandering to the lowest instincts. . . . " He deplored Pat's picture-going craze, but he would not forbid it.

Knowing his father's objection to the films, Pat still continued his weekly visits, but in a spirit of defiance, and, coming home, he launched into long accounts of what he'd seen, which would have tried the patience of a saint. His speech, like Hadley's, became imbued with Americanisms and " rough talk " acquired from his gangster idols. Conal was not a saint, but somehow he bore it, hoping it was merely a phase. Fortunately it was.

When winter came the spell was nearly spent, and he even went to a few football games with his father. By the following spring he had almost relinquished the pastime.

" Why don't you ever go to the pictures now, Pat ? " his mother asked him. " I'll give you the money, and you can take one of your mates next Saturday."

"The gang's having a picnic at Healsville next Saturday. I'd much rather go to that. The flicks aren't so hot."

"Goodness, you're funny, Pat. You were just crazy about the pictures once."

"I'm older now, and I've got more sense," he reminded her. "Don't you forget I'm fourteen."

At which mature age, he decided to renounce some of the follies of his youth.

XVIII

But his mother could not renounce them. She loved the films and the film stars. They represented beauty. They revealed to her the life she should have had. Conal said they were false standards. Well, how should a man know what women needed? Fine clothes, soft living, orchids, jewels, admiration. She saw these things on the screen, and she supposed, because she saw it, that she was looking at a true portrayal of what these fortunate women enjoyed. And she read about them in the film journals. Bette Davis, Hedy LaMarr, Lovely, lovely Greer . . . She talked about them to Doreen for hours. Doreen was trying to make herself over into a second Veronica Lake. Her ardent ambition was that Tyrone Power should fall in love with her. Julie could understand that. She drove Doreen, but she knew how she felt.

Julie had an escort to the pictures, as well as to the races. Mr. Traynor was only too delighted to oblige. Conal would have no part in it.

Sometimes she almost wished she had it in her to be unfaithful to Conal, to make him really jealous. When she was tired she felt like scenes, recriminations, emotional makings-up. But she doubted whether Conal would collaborate. She felt he wouldn't care much what she did. Besides, she couldn't pretend even to herself that she was in love with Mr. Traynor, much as she liked, and was grateful to him. If she had been, life would have been simpler.

She continually sought change, variety : new styles of hair-dressing, a new frock, lunch in town, visits to friends she hadn't seen for years, a sudden compulsion to write to Conal's brother. But what she wanted most was a holiday, a holiday to Sydney to see her sister Jessie . . . that Mecca of her dreams. She fastened her mind on it : secretly it grew.

At this point Conal had a stroke of luck. A competition was being held for a poem ; the prize, twenty pounds. Conal won it. He hadn't handled so large a cheque for many a day, and the sight of it, the expectation of its uses, elated him. Pat also was pleased. Julie was very pleased. . . .

"It's wonderful," she declared, tenderly fingering the precious slip of paper. "I'm proud of you, Conal. I wish I was even half as clever."

"What are you going to do with all that dough?" Pat inquired.

"I'm going to Central Australia." There was no doubt, no hesitation. The search was on again.

"Whatever for?" his son demanded.

"To discover the unknown. To unravel the secrets of the continent. To ride where Lassiter rode."

"Who's Lassiter?"

"Heavens, boy! Haven't you been instructed in the history of your own land? Know you not Lassiter, the last adventurer? Before the world was too old to breed man he braved the dangers of the wilderness, and was splendidly rewarded. He found gold. More gold than this country has ever seen. A great reef of gold."

"And did he make his fortune?"

"Should I have told you his story if he had? I said he was the last adventurer. Adventurers don't make fortunes. No. He came back to tell of his tremendous discovery, and an expedition set out to prove—or disprove—his words. They went forth with glad expectation seeking El Dorado, the Golden Land . . . Lassiter leading them back the way he'd come. . . . But they never found the reef. Perhaps the sand had drifted across it and buried it for another century. Perhaps Lassiter had seen it only in his mind. Perhaps he'd dreamed it. . . . But

since that day men, sane as Lassiter may not have been, have travelled to Central Australia, to seek the lost gold. . . .”

Pat's eyes widened as he listened, and Conal, like all good story-tellers, played up to this, making the tale more exotic than was strictly in accord with the truth.

“Is that why you're going to look for gold?” And his face plainly showed that, if such were the case, he was going too.

“No. I'm not going after gold. What is gold to me? I want much more than that.”

“What is there—better than gold?”

And Conal answered him with one word.

“Peace.”

Pat didn't know what to make of this, but Julie did.

“You're mad, Conal—as mad as that Lassiter you were talking about. Why in the name of fortune should you have to go all the way to Central Australia to find peace?”

“Because it's the only place I haven't looked for it.”

“Do you expect to pick it up, like a stone—or a gold nugget?”

“Not exactly. I don't know what it will be like. But I'll know when I've got it.”

“Goodness—you're crazy all right.” And Julie left the difficult theme, and began again on a lower rung of the ladder.

“Twenty pounds is a lot of money. We could do a good deal with it.” She added carelessly, as if she had just thought of it: “We could both have a holiday in Sydney.”

“That's a suggestion!” Conal's sleepy gaze revealed deep fires of contempt. “I want to get away from people—not run into them. Besides, I hate Sydney. An under-populated country can't afford the extravagance of a cosmopolitan city. It's top-heavy, squatting there by the sea, a shocking misrepresentation of our nation. . . .”

But to Julie this was heresy. The most beautiful city in the world . . . people had told her, travelled people . . . “The harbour, Conal! The wonderful harbour. . . .!”

“God made the harbour,” Conal answered, “and man defaced it.”

God, again . . . He went on to destroy, or to attempt to destroy her veneration of the beloved city; perhaps he sensed

the use to which she hoped to put his prize-money : and, a master of invective, he poured derision on the city-port, on all city-dwellers, he extolled the open spaces, the true soul of the nation. . . .

With an effort Julie brought him back. She wanted a holiday. He couldn't be so selfish as to go off alone, spend all that money on himself. She longed to see her sister Jessie once more—hadn't seen her since the old Bendigo days. . . .

"I have no desire to see your sister Jessie—ever again," he told her deliberately ; Julie's warmth, her golden promise, his desire for her—had been one thing : her semi-illiterate family, quite another. "Besides, who'd carry on here ?"

"Doreen. And her mother," Julie answered promptly—too promptly.

"So you've worked it out ? Even before you knew I'd won the prize." He rose abruptly. "You'd better get it out of your mind, my dear. I'm going to Central Australia with that money. It's mine."

The next day Julie complained of a headache and a feeling of exhaustion. Towards evening she made Pat ring the doctor, who, when he had seen her, described her condition to Conal as "run down."

"If it were possible, a holiday . . . most beneficial . . . especially as your wife seems to have her heart set on it. . . ."

That night Conal brought out the hidden supply of whisky from Pat's play-box, and taking it down to the kitchen, drank through the hours of darkness into the glimmering dawn.

When daylight was giving shape to the world again, Pat was awakened by the sound of voices from below. His mother was trying to make Conal go to bed. She was forceful, scolding—Conal spoke protestingly, hampered by the cough which seemed to break his speech when he had been drinking. Pat had heard this sort of thing many times before. But now—perhaps because he was older and had a little more perception—he found a new suggestion of tragedy in their muffled tones. It was the tragedy of incompatibility, of disappointment. Each had betrayed the other's faith. So that's marriage, he thought. That's marriage

for you. . . . He put his hands over his ears, and tried to blot it out.

But he couldn't. He had to listen. There was a heavy dragging sound, which must mean that Conal was being assisted from the kitchen. As he passed through the door, Pat heard him say in a strange, blurred way :

"Salt bush and mulga scrub . . . and the dried creek beds . . . and the sudden night in the desert . . . I'll go there someday. . . . You'll see . . . I'll go there . . . and there will be peace . . . peace for ever. . . ."

XIX

Towards the close of the year the gang suffered a total eclipse. Its end was really approaching with the expulsion of Tiger although at the time nobody realized it. Not long after this notable event Curly and his family moved to another suburb, and during the winter Mr. Timms went to take up employment in Sydney, and was soon followed by his wife and Micky. So only four of the original members remained. They considered seeking new blood, but put off from week to week the final decision of whom to include.

One evening early in December Pat was summoned from his home by Hadley, who called him from the gate. When he went out to see what his first officer wanted, Hadley said :

"Walk down to my place with me, Pat. I got something to tell you."

They set off along the foot-path. It was a mild night. The summer sky was studded with stars, and there wasn't a breath of wind anywhere.

Hadley walked with his hands in his pockets, and for a time did not divulge his mysterious news. At last he spoke.

"We're shifting to-morrow. Dad wanted a place nearer the works, and Mum's found one at last."

"Where is it ?"

"Way down Williamstown somewhere. Hell of a way from here."

"Everyone's shifting," Pat complained. "First Curly, then Micky, now you. Why can't people stay put, like we do? It mucks everything up. . . . But you'll be able to come over and join the gang at the week-ends and in the holidays, won't you?"

"That's just it. I can't. I'm going onto my uncle's farm in New South Wales. He raises chickens. Later on I may go in for it myself."

"Looks like the end of the gang," Pat said with a sudden sharp sense of loss.

"No, it don't. You've still got Jem and Bill. And you can get some new blokes. You'll have lots more fun out of it," Hadley offered bracingly, trying to find a bright ray in a sombre world.

"I'm fed up with Jem. That sister of his is always in tow. And Bill's got no brains of his own—only picks other people's," Pat answered, refusing to be cheered. "It's no good. If you leave, the gang's busted. What do you want to go on the land for? My mother says it's lousy."

"Well, she's wrong. It's a good life. Why don't you come too? My uncle could easily take on another hand. You're fourteen, and you'll finish school end of the year. Besides, your muscles are pretty near as strong as mine."

"Stronger!" Pat retorted. "I'm the champ, and don't you forget it, neither."

"I won't. That's why we elected you boss. For your brawn. Not your brain. Can't have both, see? I got one, you got the other."

"Sez you? I got 'em both. Don't be such a filthy liar." But it was said half-heartedly, and having made the necessary protest, he went on with the conversation: "I haven't decided what I'm going to do next. May go on to the High. Anyhow, you'd better expect me when you see me. . . . What about a last do with the gang? Farewell speeches and all that?"

Hadley shook his head.

"Not on your life. It'd give me the blue devils."

Pat didn't press the point. He was feeling pretty badly about it and he had an idea that Hadley felt the same. They had always showed off, and pretended, and cheeked and insulted each other, and now that they weren't in the mood for such

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diversions they found they had nothing to say. Or perhaps there was plenty to say, but no possible way of saying it.

The lights of the Rowe's house filtered through the half-drawn blinds. They stopped some paces away.

"Well, so long, St. Patrick."

"So long, Had."

Hadley gave him an embarrassed slap on the shoulder, and then went into his house whistling. But Pat knew what sort of whistling it was.

As he retraced his steps he thought of something Conal had once said to him :

"You can't go back to things as they were before. Something happens—and then it isn't like it used to be ever again."

When he told the others that their association was to be dissolved Jem and Bill protested bitterly. But Pat was adamant. Something had happened. There was a break, and it was no use trying to mend it.

(END OF PART ONE)

PART TWO

CROSS CURRENTS

I

THAT year Pat got his merit certificate. He was now ready for promotion to the High School. But his mother had other plans. Without telling her husband she wrote a letter to his brother, acquainting him with the news of Pat's achievement. To this she received a reply which awoke most pleasant expectations. Stephen would be glad if she and Conal would bring Pat to tea at his home on the following afternoon, so that he and his wife might offer their congratulations, and discuss Pat's future.

Pat's future.

On that she was staking all her thwarted ambitions. Jubilantly she showed Conal the letter of invitation. She watched his face as he read, but she could not interpret his expression.

"His Majesty commands, and we, I presume, obey," he remarked, as he handed it back, and he smiled quizzically at her. "The high, mighty, and most puissant prince dispenses charity with his usual high-souled patronage."

"Now, Conal . . ." Julie spoke warningly; she was not going to have her careful plans upset. "Don't you start any nonsense. You know very well all your brother could do for Pat. I've our son's interest at heart, even if you haven't. Stephen could afford to give him a first-class education and training and never notice it."

"I don't see why he should. He has a daughter. Even daughters cost a man a penny or two. Besides Pat will get a perfectly sound education at the expense of the State. Good enough to fit him for whatever he proposes to take up."

Conal had no respect for a formal education. He told everyone he'd learnt nothing at his public school. The so-called

advantages, he declared, were merely social—and he left no doubt in anyone's mind just how low was his estimation of social advantages. To him Life was the great educator. He would care very little what career his son chose to adopt, so long as he came in close contact with life.

Time and time again he had quarrelled with his brother, who differed from him completely in his fundamental attitude towards the business of living. At school Stephen had been popular, successful, admired; Conal had been bookish, unsociable. They were known as "Donahue" and "Donahue's brother". The terms, and what lay behind them, followed them past their school-days. Stephen built up the family reputation, Conal did his best to destroy it. Stephen married an heiress, beautiful, talented; Conal married—Julie. But then again it was Conal, and not Stephen, who had waded through the blood and anguish of war. It had marked him, and left Stephen untouched. For none of these things could they forgive each other.

Stephen's home was situated in Toorak among other homes of other fortunate citizens—the snobs, as Pat called them, soon he would substitute the word: capitalist. The fine dwellings stood each in its own garden, each with its drive, its car (or cars). This was where you took up residence when you were successful. This address was the only one you could suffer your letters to bear, this atmosphere the only one in which you could develop suitably. It was a hall-mark, a criterion of your achievement. Without it, you were nobody. With it, you were at the top—and the admiring world cast envious eyes at your pinnacle, for with your hands you might almost touch the stars.

Stephen's house was large, solidly built in grey stone with a green-tiled roof. It stood back in its carefully laid-out garden, among its lawns, its brilliant flower-beds, flanked by its grass tennis-court, its garage. A parlour-maid, trim in cap and apron, opened the door, and brought them across the square panelled hall to the entrance of the spacious drawing-room, where Stephen's wife stood waiting to receive them.

As soon as she looked at Catherine, Julie knew she was overdressed. In brilliant green, with showy cheap jewellery, she sensed the contrast. Catherine was the picture of simplicity, in a dark

frock, cut to emphasize her slim grace ; her blonde beauty, had no embellishment, save a pair of tiny pearl earrings and her plain wedding ring. In a glance, sharp with envy, Julie realized how the other woman fitted into the elegant severity of the light, white room with its wide french windows opening on the lawn.

Catherine kissed Julie and shook hands cordially with Conal and Pat.

"I used to kiss you when you were little," she told the last-named with a smile, "but I see you've grown too big for that."

Pat agreed emphatically that : yes, he was much too big.

Before the mantel-piece, under the large oval mirror, stood Stephen and his daughter, Winifred. In build and colouring alike Pat resembled his uncle, for Stephen was thick-set with the wide shoulders of a sportsman (in his youth he had been a cricketer of some note and had represented his State in contests for the Sheffield Shield). He had dark hair, and his eyes were blue and thickly lashed, like Pat's. His features, though, were better, and his mouth had more mobility ; it was, indeed, a strikingly handsome face, and such could not have been said about Pat's. But Stephen, who had delighted crowds with the matchless grace and style he possessed when cutting and driving before the wickets, was growing stout ; he moved more slowly, and at the temples his hair showed streaks of grey. Like Conal he had married in his late thirties. Winifred, who gave Pat a supercilious stare, was the plainest daughter of handsome parents ever seen.

With an attempt at heartiness not altogether spontaneous Stephen advanced to shake hands with his relatives.

"This is a very happy occasion," he said to Julie. "I was delighted to hear the good news of my nephew. Thank you for writing to inform me of it."

"You needn't thank a mother for reporting good news of her son," Conal interposed. "Rather would I thank her for refraining."

"Conal always makes light of things," Julie said quickly. "He's really just as proud of Pat as I am. But he chooses to hide it."

Stephen turned to his brother. He held out his hand, but

Conal would not take it. The ordinary manifestations of social intercourse left him cold.

"God, Stevie, how fat you've got!" was his greeting. "You couldn't wield the willow with such effect now. But never mind. Go on as you are, and in a few years you could play Falstaff."

"I'd like that tongue of yours served up to me on a platter," answered Stephen, trying not to show he was irritated.

"Here's our famous scholar, dear," Catherine ventured to put a word between their animosity.

Almost with relief Stephen turned from his brother to his brother's son. He had done a lot for Conal, and it rankled that Conal wasn't grateful. He did not want Conal's respect nor his fraternal affection, if he were not prepared to give them—but he wanted Conal's gratitude. Stephen liked to have people feel grateful to him. As if divining this, Conal refused him satisfaction.

"Well, Patrick, I hear from your mother that you've distinguished yourself." Again he held out his hand, this time with rather a tentative movement, for he had been rebuffed once.

"Shake hands with your uncle, Pat," Julie ordered.

Pat obeyed her.

"But I haven't done nothing," he said. "Everyone gets their Merit."

"A nice sense of modesty," Stephen commented, inwardly wincing at the boy's accent and his grammatical blunder. "Like the industry that accompanies it, it should certainly not go unrewarded."

"Take Pat into the garden, Win, and show him the new puppy," said Catherine. She held the view that children should not listen to the conversation of their elders, especially when they were to form the main topic for discussion. In this she was unlike Pat's parents, who talked (and argued) freely in front of him.

Pat followed his cousin from the room, feeling dreadfully bored. He couldn't stand Winifred: she was priggish, superior and plain; she had the air of one who wished to set the world to rights.

On the lawn they found the new pup—a golden cocker spaniel

named Mop, with the long silken ears of its breed, and the tragic eyes.

"Daddy gave him to me for my birthday. It was last week," his cousin informed him. "Guess how old I was? Twelve. Getting on, aren't I?"

"That's nothing. I'm fourteen." Pat sat down on the grass and began to play with the puppy, infinitely preferring it to its mistress. He had always wanted to keep a dog, but his mother had forbidden it, on account of the lodgers. Winifred seated herself beside him.

"You go to the State school, don't you?" she inquired by way of opening the conversation.

"I did. But now I've got my Merit I'm going to the High."

"What's that—your Merit?"

"Merit Certificate, stupid. You can't go to the High unless you get it."

"We don't have that at our school. But I suppose private schools are different. The State school's free, isn't it?"

"Of course it is. All education should be free and state-controlled. Like it is in Russia." He was quite capable of holding his position, even against as much superiority and complacency as Winifred controlled.

"Oh, Russia. . . ." Winifred dismissed it as hopelessly outside her sphere. "I'd hate to go to school where you'd have to mix with all sorts. At my school they're awfully particular who they take. It's a very nice school. And only nice girls go there."

"How nice!" He imitated her voice and air. "But don't you sometimes wish you could meet some girls what wasn't so nice?"

Winifred opened her eyes wide.

"That's the most awful grammar. 'Who' is the relative pronoun you should use when you're talking about people—not what. And you can't use 'wasn't' with a plural noun."

"I can use 'wasn't' with any damned noun I like," he retorted.

Winifred was further incensed. "You mustn't say 'damn'. That's swearing. . . . I've never heard anything worse than the way you speak. You've the most frightful Australian accent."

"I'll say I have! What do you think I am? A Dutchman?"

"You know what I mean. Educated people speak like the English."

"But I'm not English. Why should I speak like them?"

"Because they set us an example. That's why. And we should try to copy it."

"Like hell we should!" Pat was beginning to be annoyed. "I'm an Australian. If you stuck-up people like to copy foreigners you can. But I'm not going to be a sucker. I've got my own life and my own way of talking—and no one's going to put me right."

Winifred flushed at his tone. He really was the rudest, most insufferable boy she had ever met. She was very sorry indeed that by an unkind turn of fate he was, for all the days of their lives, her first cousin. All she hoped was that her delightful schoolmates should never discover the dark family secret.

"You ought to be proud of the English language. After all, it was Shakespeare's. It was good enough for him, wasn't it? But I suppose you don't care for Shakespeare." Sharply, and a little shrewishly, she added: "A boy like you wouldn't."

Pat didn't contradict her. He went on playing with the dog. As a matter of fact he was pretty keen on Shakespeare—not so much for his English, but for his Macbeth. It was an easy matter for him to take on that personality: Macbeth, whom the witches hailed and drove on, through crime and bloodshed; who lived violently, encompassed on all sides by darkness and death; who slew the king, and fiercely, nobly, advanced to face just retribution when he saw that the game was up . . . Winifred was probably thinking of midsummer nights, enchanted forests, fairies, and girls in silly disguises—kid's stuff. But Shakespeare was better than that. Shakespeare was Macbeth, and Macbeth was—or might have been—Pat himself. "I have supped full with horrors . . ." Gladly Pat supped with him.

He liked violence. He liked even death. But of death he had only a romantic conception—the sudden termination of adventure, gallant and beautifully final. He had never been close enough to the reality to see it in any other light. He viewed it with the eyes of the story-teller, the ballad-maker, the child. . . .

But Winifred was not discussing death, she was discussing English.

"Don't you learn grammar at the State school?" she asked.

"I'll say we do. And we get it hot if we don't know our stuff. But all that's over when school's over. I don't talk the way I'm taught. I talk the way my gang does." Which was a very penetrating correct statement. He could easily have spoken better. His father had a fine, cultured voice, with a notable command of language; his son could have adapted his speech to this example. But Pat chose the gang's way, the way of his contemporaries and confederates. . . .

"Your gang? Have you got a gang?" At last he had a firm hold of Winifred's interest. Following it up, he gave her a hair-raising account of the gang's activities, not mentioning the fact that it was recently disbanded. He told her of fantastic escapes from the police, attempted robberies, a plan to hold up a bank in the manner of Ned Kelly. Winifred listened, inclined to disbelieve, but carried away in spite of herself. If her relationship to Pat would never bring her social aggrandizement, it might produce the next best thing—notoriety.

The story was interrupted by Stephen's calling them in to tea. Pat got up with alacrity. Aunt Catherine's teas were always a high-light.

He found that the repast set forth was well up to his most sanguine expectations, and Julie had to prod him in the back a number of times to remind him that there was a limit to the number of cream cakes a guest might enjoy, and yet retain a few manners.

When his mother's opposition became too pronounced, he was reluctantly forced to state he'd had enough; it was at this point that Uncle Stephen took the floor.

"Your Aunt Catherine and I are very pleased with the way you've worked at school, Pat," he began, a trifle portentously, and not without a trace of self-consciousness. "We feel that you deserve as good an education as we can give you. You see, ours is an old family. There are certain traditions old families like to maintain. Even in a new country like this—well, the name goes on, doesn't it? See what I mean? The name

Donahue. . . .” But he couldn’t get round to it that way ; he started again : “ You see, we haven’t——” But that was no good either. He glanced in the direction of his wife, as if seeking forgiveness for what was nearly a blunder, and appealing for assistance.

Catherine spoke up quickly.

“ You’re old enough to understand, aren’t you, Pat ? The family name means a lot to your uncle. And you’re the only boy——” She smiled faintly, a little sadly, “ You’re the only boy we’ve got between us.” At that Pat heard his mother catch her breath in what was almost a sob, and he sensed that this was all very important to all of them (except, perhaps, his father, who stood quietly smoking by the window), and he wished to God they’d leave him alone.

“ I want to send you to a public school, Pat, and later to the university,” Stephen continued. “ I’m sure you’ll repay us by doing your best. . . . And I think we’re going to be proud of you.” He finished quickly, with obvious relief, and took out his pipe.

“ Isn’t it kind ? Isn’t it splendid ? Oh, Pat, you’re a lucky, lucky boy ! ” Julie could no longer curb her excitement. This was exactly what she had wanted. She stood up, her cheeks glowing, and came over to Pat’s side, placing a hand on his shoulder. “ Say thank you to your uncle, Pat.” She gave him a slight push. Pat moved away impatiently ; he was not going to be pushed about. This required thought, not precipitate action.

“ We’ve chosen Melbourne Grammar,” said Catherine. She was watching Pat closely. She saw the great likeness between him and her husband ; she saw also the difference. She knew he hated being pushed and stampeded, and she was trying to give him time. “ Both your uncle and your father went there. . . .”

“ And who was the clever one ? ” Winifred asked.

“ Oh, Pat’s father,” Catherine responded brightly, looking across at Conal by the window. “ He wrote poems for the school magazine. Didn’t you, Conal ? And Stephen thought of nothing but cricket. . . .” Her voice trailed away. Stephen was waiting for Pat to speak.

"Well, what about it?" he asked.

Pat looked directly at his uncle.

"Not on your life," he said clearly. "I don't want to have anything to do with the snobs. I belong to the working class. Besides, I won't take favours." His tone was quite uncompromising.

There was a moment of absolute stillness. Outside, where the sun shone, a blackbird was singing. Stephen broke the dreadful pause.

"Well, that seems to be that," he said, with an attempt at light-heartedness. "I congratulate you on your son, Conal. I know where he gets that uncouthness."

"Oh, but wait!" Catherine cried in distress, seeing Julie's face. "Give him a chance to think it over. We were in too much of a hurry. We took it for granted he would fall in with our plans. We must give him more time."

"Time!" Her husband took her up sharply. "I can't see any necessity for that. We've made our offer, and I don't mind admitting that I think it's a damned generous one. All that's expected of Pat is his acceptance—and thanks."

"Go on, Pat. Say thank you."

Julie put all the force she could muster into the order, but her spirit quailed. Pat stood there in the centre of the floor, his hands in his pockets, his mouth set in the stubborn line she knew so well, and feared so much; his brows drawn down in the scowl which could darken his face into something very unpleasing. That part of this expression was a form of protection, of self-defence, she was not aware; she only knew that her will and his were competing for mastery.

"Your uncle has made an extremely generous suggestion, Pat. A good education is the best thing a boy can have to start life. I know it is. And that's why I've always wanted it for you. When you go after a job it makes all the difference if you can say you've been to a public school. Even if you don't believe it now, you will some day. Trust me, dear, and later on you'll own that I was right."

From all this, Conal stood aloof. It would have been hard to guess whose side he was on—his wife's or his son's. Perhaps

he did not want to outweigh the balance by participation ; he was content to watch the fight for supremacy between the two—perhaps, even, he foresaw to whom the victory would go.

“ At least show your uncle that you’re grateful,” Julie exhorted, clutching at a straw.

“ I’m not grateful for favours.”

Impatiently Stephen turned away.

“ It’s no use, Julie. I’m not going to spend my money on a young Communist, or whatever he likes to call himself. It would be just throwing it away. . . . I’m sorry. But I’m afraid Pat has spoiled his chances this time.”

“ He’s a thief too, Daddy,” Winifred interposed excitedly. She had been listening with the most wrapt attention to what had been said, and now chose this moment to make her contribution. “ He has a gang like Ned Kelly’s. He told me. And they rob people and hold up banks, just like Ned did.”

“ I wouldn’t be surprised,” was Stephen’s short comment on this announcement, but his wife interposed, gently, but firmly :

“ Nonsense, Win. He’s been telling you fairy tales.”

Winifred looked doubtful. “ Some of it might have been true.”

“ None of it’s true,” said Julie quickly. “ Pat reads a lot and has a lot of imagination too. . . . That’s all.”

“ I advise you to watch that imagination of his very closely.” Stephen advised his sister-in-law rather sourly. “ It’s probably hereditary . . . but not on my side of the family.” To this Conal saw fit to bow acknowledgments. . . .

After that the guests made their departure.

Once they were clear of Stephen’s house, Julie started to give vent to her stifled feelings of indignation and despair. After all she had tried to do . . . Pat was the most ungrateful boy alive, not only to his uncle, but to her, his mother . . . he had ruined his chances . . . destroyed her hopes. . . . The diatribe, heavy with repetition, showed no signs of abating : along St. George’s Road, into the tram—where those most impressed were the stout elderly gentleman sitting opposite, two gaunt spinster ladies, and the tram conductor. When Julie let herself go,

there was no holding her, even in public. From her men-folk she received neither encouragement nor conflict. Pat said nothing. Conal whistled under his breath, and looked out of the window.

Arrived at the stop nearest home, they alighted, and began to walk up the road. Julie's monologue continued unappeased.

"Someday you'll be sorry. See if I'm not right. You'll wish you'd listened to your mother. You'll wish you'd taken her advice. But it will be too late. Second chances don't happen in this world. Your Uncle Stephen will never offer you anything again. You just see if I'm not right."

They had reached the gate of their home before Conal spoke. As he opened the gate for her, he said, suddenly :

"Can't you leave the kid alone ?"

The unexpectedness of his championship brought an uncomfortable lump into Pat's throat, which he had to swallow two or three times before he was able to dispose of it.

II

Stephen's reference to family and family tradition meant very little to Pat. He had never got over his disappointment in his ancestors, who belonged to no rebellious faction, who could not boast a single leader of a forlorn enterprise. These Donahues of Belfast, Northern Ireland, had always been sound, dependable business men, utterly loyal to the crown, their politics conventional and conservative, their religion unwaveringly that of the established Church of England.

True, Pat's grandfather had broken away, and by his emigration, established a new precedent. But once in Melbourne where he had formed the shipping company of which Stephen was now managing director, he had settled down to a similar existence (although perhaps a more prosperous one) to his brothers at home. Careful, thrifty, the Donahue men had always married well, and both Stephen and his father before him had not broken faith in this particular.

Conal alone set a different course. His father's home had galled and exasperated him; he looked askance at his father's politics, his father's religion.

At one time his family had feared that Conal might go over to the Church of Rome. He often said that his religion debarred his full association with descendants of other Irish families, who were also building their lives in a new land, but sought continuity of contact with their father's God.

The fears however proved groundless. On closer acquaintance with certain of the articles of the Catholic faith—and closely had he applied his whole intellect to their study—Conal had found himself irreconcilably opposed to them. Arguments with priests, with enlightened Catholic friends, had failed to convert him, and he had gone no farther along that road. In turn he tried other religions, eagerly seeking appeasement of his unsatisfied demands, but none of them could give him what he sought—perhaps because it was the unattainable.

These experiments, these seekings, were concluded before Pat was born. By that time, having abandoned all formal observances, Conal attended no church, this being the explanation of why his son had never been baptized. Julie, who had had no religious training, was quite unworried by doubts of a spiritual sort, although it would have pleased her well enough to see Pat brought into the fold, merely because it was the right thing to do; and Julie was not inclined to find fault with what was generally accepted as right. To Conal, however, hers was a disastrously unmoral view.

"You'd have him baptised merely for the spectacle," he said on that occasion. "An empty show without significance. Wait until he's a man, to decide for himself his own allegiance. . . . Anything else seems to me desecration. . . ." For, having no accepted creed, he was, at heart, as deeply religious as many a better man.

Miss Sagood, an elderly lady, who flatly refused to leave Eastridge, no matter how pointed were Julie's hints of her unpopularity among the residue of her lodgers—all male—engaged him in many a heated argument.

"You modern parents don't know what you're doing," she

declared. At seventy-one she could take a stand against the youth of the day—although Conal was past fifty and reckoned himself a veteran. “How are children going to know right from wrong if you don’t make them go to church? How will they be able to resist temptation? Why, they won’t even know that it is temptation!”

Conal enjoyed altercations. He enjoyed shocking Miss Sagood—a not very difficult feat. Now he answered her smoothly:

“Making them go to church won’t teach them right from wrong. They’ll never learn anything worth having unless they come to it willingly and gladly. If I forced Pat into church he’d grow to hate it—and me. If he chooses to go of his own accord—good luck to him! I hope he finds there the consolation I’ve missed.”

“He’s not likely to want to go when you haven’t shown him the way,” the formidable old lady with the sharp features and keen brown eyes retorted forcefully. “After all, he’s no more than a child. You take children to meet your relatives and friends, don’t you?”

Conal laughed. “So I’m to take Pat to meet his God, am I? Introduce them, I suppose. God—this is Pat. Pat, I want you to meet an old friend, an acquaintance of your grandfather’s, and his father’s before him——”

Miss Sagood was scandalized—and angry, because she thought (and rightly) that Conal was laughing at her. Like most fanatics she distrusted humour, and Conal’s humour especially she found distinctly blasphemous.

“I’ve no patience with you, Conal. You’ve no respect for anything. You’re indulging that boy, and bringing him up to be irreligious and impertinent. Be careful he doesn’t come to grief. If he does, you’ll have only yourself to thank.”

Conal’s sleepy eyes darted a rare flash of fire.

“Whether he knows it or not, he’s in God’s hands as much as you or I,” he said with an intensity even her dogmatism could not answer. “Because I believe in the divinity of the spirit, I know that Pat is safe.”

The words echoed in her mind long after the conversation was over, longer even than Conal remembered it.

III

Another inmate of Eastridge was Doreen Phipps, the undernourished little blonde, who wanted to look like a film-star. With this end in view, she dieted, bleached her hair, and affected poses—all very unsuited to a life of drugery in Julie's old-fashioned, grimy kitchen.

Doreen's abiding trouble was her succession of unsatisfactory "boy-friends." She had an unhappy knack of attracting a faithless type, that paid her attention when there was nothing else on hand, but deserted her the moment something more attractive appeared. Every inhabitant of Eastridge was aware when Doreen had been turned down—her lugubrious air, disinterest and general inefficiency were obvious enough. Conversely happiness radiated from her when a new love took over—for Doreen never really lost hope in someday finding a great romance.

The lodgers read the signs—cold toast, mixed orders, and empty sugar-bowls when disillusionment clouded the horizon, smiles and quick service when the sun shone. They had their own pass-words: "Dished again. . . ." "The Girl should try a new technique. . . ." "Heard about the shortage of Romeos?" And: "It's on again—nearly tripped over a likely swain on the door-step last night. . . ." "What she can see in him. . . . Still, beggars can't choose, and it means fresh tea instead of stewed. . . ."

Pat though girls silly enough. But Doreen was outside his comprehension. Really, for everyone's sake, she should be made to listen to reason—masculine reason. He decided to take her in hand.

"Why do you worry so much about boys?" he asked her one day. "Go out with another girl—and stick your thumb against your nose."

"You don't understand, Pat." Doreen drew a floury hand across her forehead to push back the maltreated hair that had patiently undergone a variety of experiments. "I got to have a boy-friend. I can't be different."

"Why can't you?" Sitting on the table beside her, he swung his legs violently back and forth as an indication of his scorn for the stupidities of set behaviour. "Why can't you be different? Start a fashion. The girl who doesn't give a damn for boys."

Doreen bent over the pudding she was mixing.

"You're only a kid. Someday you'll know what it's like. You'll want a girl—someday."

"Sez you?" He stuck a finger into the pudding mixture, and sampled it, his head on one side. "Not sweet enough, my beauty. . . ." Abstractedly she added more sugar. "If I do ever have a girl," he went on, "I won't let her plaster her face with make-up like you and Mum. Take your mouth now . . . it's got no shape with that stuff thick all over it. Probably it's that what puts your boy-friends off. Take my advice——"

"Your advice!" Doreen broke an egg vindictively into the basin as some relief to her feelings. "What do you know about it? You never been in love. . . ." A tear joined the other ingredients, and went into the making of the pudding.

"Oh, so it's love, is it? That why you're howling?"

At his question further tears made their presence evident, and Doreen began to sniff inelegantly.

"It's Fred Carpenter. Or it was, I should say, because it's all over now. . . ." Doreen had decided that any sympathy—even Pat's—was better than keeping her own counsel, and she blurted out an involved tale of misunderstandings, quarrels, apologies, leading up to the dismal climax of Fred's last unkind letter, in which he confessed that it had been a mistake. . . . "They all say that," she gulped. "It's always we made a mistake. I know what it means. It means another girl. . . . Think I don't know that? And he was going to take me out to-night. To the pictures . . . Robert Taylor. He let me choose because it's my birthday. . . ."

"Is it really? How old are you?" Pat asked, taking

advantage of her emotion to help himself freely to her mixture.

"Eighteen."

He looked up, surprised.

"Eighteen? Is that all? I thought you were about thirty."

She was only four years older than he was. Scarcely more than a child, and she worked as hard as a grown woman—harder than many grown women. It made him pause. It made him think.

At that moment Mr. Traynor opened the door and entered the kitchen. As a favoured lodger he often came in to speak to Julie. He had the air of one assured of his welcome.

"Is your mother here?" he asked Pat.

"If she is I can't see her," and Pat looked under the table as if expecting to find his mother concealed there.

"Ah, very funny . . . !" Mr. Traynor tried hard to like Pat—for Julie's sake, but he found himself almost unequal to the task. "Well, tell her when she comes in I've got a winner for next Saturday. A certainty. Got it straight from the horse."

"O.K." His eyes fell on Doreen. "By the way it's Doreen's birthday." After all, birthdays set you apart, increased your importance—for a day. Pat could, of course, quite see why Fred had got tired of Doreen: any man would. But he might have chosen another day to have told her so.

"Many happy returns, Doreen," said Mr. Traynor genially. "But surely you're not crying. . . . Why this will never do! On your birthday we must have only smiles. . . ." He was genuinely distressed. He liked Doreen. She was a nice little girl. Brought him a second cup of tea without ever having to be told, and knew to come to him first in the dining-room for his order.

"Her boy friend was going to take her out. Now he can't make it," Pat explained, tactfully avoiding mention of the reason why Fred Carpenter couldn't make it.

"What a shame!" Mr. Traynor was considering what amends might be made. At last he had it. "Look here—I've got some chocolates. Bought them for my sister. But I can easily

buy her some more to-morrow. Come up to my room, Pat, and get them for Doreen."

Doreen showed slight signs of a reviving interest in life. Under her falling lock of blonde hair she regarded de Courcy Traynor and found his expression exquisitely kindly. She had always admired this smooth-tongued gentleman, with the sleek oiled hair and small moustache. He reminded her a little of Don Ameche.

"That's awfully nice of you," she began, but Mr. Traynor wouldn't have it.

"Not at all, not at all. A pleasure. Come, Pat."

Unfortunately his assumed friendliness, his assurance, the general implication inherent in his manner that he was indispensable to Eastridge reacted unpleasantly on Pat.

"I got work to do," he said, getting off the table. "Besides, as the chocolates are for Doreen she'd better go up with you herself and get them."

With which he took himself off, hearing Doreen say as he left:

"I'll have to finish this pudding. But I'll come up after dinner."

"Yes, do . . . By the way, Mrs. Donahue is going out to-night, isn't she?"

"Yes. She's going to see friends," Doreen answered, and Mr. Traynor, as if in conclusion, repeated: "Come up after dinner. I'm glad I've got those chocolates. . . ."

IV

That was at the beginning of Pat's first year at the High School. It was 1944, and his fifteenth birthday coincided with the Allied landings in France. It was all exciting, but remote from Pat's particular world. Conal was engrossed in it, but Conal knew most of the places because of that other war. For his part, Pat was waiting to see the end of Hitler. He'd read many books about him, for wasn't he a most fascinating gang-leader with a technique Pat couldn't help but admire? For sheer devilry

he'd often put up quite a good case for Hitler, and likened him to Hannibal and Napoleon. Conal had told him right through that the Hitlers of the world presented a very real, a very pressing danger, that force once unleashed must of necessity envelop the earth, but Pat had either smiled or unashamedly enjoyed it. When Conal spoke to him of patriotism, of freedom, he felt that his father was reverting to 1914. When Conal quoted Rupert Brooke—which, in spite of his broken ideals, he sometimes did—Pat shivered, because Brooke was to him (he said) a real pain in the neck. Meanwhile the war in Australia's near north dragged on.

During the year, a new "guest" took up his abode at Eastridge: an Austrian musician. Julie was elated at this satisfactory addition to her ménage. She loved foreigners, she loved music. Mr. Keller was distinctly "interesting". Tall and pale, about thirty, with dark hair and eyes, and expressive hands, he looked as if he had had a most tragic history, and she promised herself long, intimate conversations with him. He was employed by a government department on translation work, he told Julie, and he also revealed the fact that, besides interpreting the music of others, he was a composer himself. When he explained to her that he needed a piano, Julie immediately offered him full use of the old instrument in the lounge, on which Conal sometimes played the Moonlight Sonata, the only work he knew.

Mr. Keller sat down before her piano and struck a few chords. Julie was delighted with his professional touch, and the ease and charm of his manner.

"Yes. This instrument would suit me well. But I can't play in here, with your other guests about."

"They're out all day. And mostly in the evenings too. You wouldn't be disturbed."

But the stranger shook his head with firmness and decision.

"Ah, no. That would not do. I must have a piano in my room. Sometimes in the night a theme will come to me, and I cannot rest until I have played it over, and written it down."

"How very clever of you. You must play me some of your compositions." Julie was so attracted by the newcomer that, for once, her concern for the comfort of her other lodgers was

in abeyance; how they would respond to the innovation of piano-playing in the small hours she did not wait to consider. "I'll tell you what. I'll get my husband to move the piano upstairs. That is, if you do decide to take the room."

Mr. Keller made a slight inclination of the head. "It is so very kind of you. I can no longer hesitate. This is the right address for me." He smiled as he added: "I hope I'm worth all your trouble."

At a much later time Julie remembered those words of his and the peculiar rueful tone with which they were uttered. Now she took them for no more than the delightful humility of good breeding. She answered warmly:

"Of course you are! We've all felt so dreadfully sorry about Austria. You were let down in a way, weren't you? Britain and France should have done so much more. . . . Well, I don't suppose you want to talk about it. I expect you've got relatives there?"

Mr. Keller dropped his gaze and murmured rather inaudibly that he had. Julie's first impression of tragedy had been correct.

Conal was not nearly as enthusiastic—especially when he heard that he would have to move the piano up the narrow staircase to satisfy the midnight whims of an unknown composer. He was sorry enough for the Austrians. But his sorrow was not quite so strong as to dissipate grave personal inconvenience.

"Why the hell can't he compose in the lounge? No one will get a wink of sleep with him strumming all night. You score there, Pat. You won't hear him in your room."

"He won't play all night. He's a charming man, and will think of others, I'm sure. We ought to be glad to have the chance to help an artist, and encourage him. I've often heard you say that, Conal." And Julie spoke no more than truth.

"By your account this one hardly needs encouraging. Wants a lot, doesn't he? Nowhere else would he get a room with a piano thrown in. I only hope the other lodgers don't ask for pianos too. . . ."

"Stop grouching. Pat will help you carry it up. It'll be very nice for him to come in contact with an artist . . . and a man of good manners," she said feelingly.

"It would be nicer to come in contact with his jaw," Pat replied. He got up. "What about the blasted piano, Conal?"

The two of them removed their coats and struggled for an hour with the unwieldy instrument. When it was finally deposited in the small upstairs room which was to be Keller's, they both felt exceedingly unfriendly towards Julie's new acquisition.

"I don't like foreigners," Pat remarked as he mopped his forehead, "and a foreign artist is just about the last hope."

"I don't mind that. What I object to is this damned playing at night. Especially if he's no good. Which is very probably the case," answered Conal, and then he began to cough, the result of strenuous and unaccustomed exertion.

Keller moved in, and Julie set to work to cultivate him. Mr. Traynor might have resented this, had he not been engaged elsewhere.

v

As the star boarder, Mr. Traynor was given supper every night at ten. In the past, Julie had carried him up a tray, but since the arrival of the young Austrian a slight estrangement had caused this task to be deputized, and it was Doreen who went up with the supper. Where Julie had merely knocked and departed, Doreen turned the handle of the door and went into Mr. Traynor's room. And she did not return very promptly. Her mind engaged with matters musical, Julie failed to observe this.

Indeed she missed a good deal—more than Pat did. For one day he had come upon Doreen and Mr. Traynor embracing in the passage. The sight gave him a shock: the pale girl, with her narrow, undeveloped figure and fair hair with its Garbo-like wave, caught up and held with passion by the gross, middle-aged man—both of them oblivious of their surroundings and lost in the physical life of the other. It was not a picture he could dismiss in a hurry. Yet it was only momentary, for at the sound of his step, they sprang apart. Mr. Traynor gave a laugh which

sought ease and failed to find it, and offered Pat a florin. Two bob was two bob, but resolutely Pat shook his head. Mr. Traynor had tried to bribe him on other occasions—with the same amount of success.

"I don't tell tales. Unless"—he was determined to reserve his freedom of action—"unless I want to." That was as much satisfaction as he felt inclined to give a man who was his undeclared enemy.

After that, his eyes open a little wider to the light of dawning adulthood, he noticed other things. He saw that Doreen was gay, as she only was when she had a new boy-friend. But she seldom went out. In the evenings she dressed herself carefully, as if she were going to the pictures, and sat down in the kitchen until ten o'clock. Then she disappeared, Pat went to bed, and Julie talked to the Austrian musician. All this time Mr. Traynor was particularly bright, and hummed one of the latest tunes as he went up and down stairs. Generally the atmosphere of Eastridge had never been so happy.

Like a fragile bubble, however, the spell of happiness soon disintegrated. Doreen's gaiety fled. She looked pale, her eyes had red rims round them, and more than once Pat had seen her shedding tears. She tarried no longer with the supper tray, and there was sometimes a look on her face which was as much like fear as anything else he knew. Mr. Traynor's good spirits also appeared to have suffered a set-back. Pat supposed they had had a row. But the rows were only about to begin.

One morning when he was dressing in his room he heard voices in the kitchen below, voices raised and angry. His mother and Doreen were quarrelling; Conal was also present. It was exasperating that the floor of his room admitted sound to such an extent as this, but at the same time prevented it from becoming intelligible.

As soon as possible he went down, hoping he hadn't missed it all. At the sight of him, however, their angry voices were abruptly checked, as three heads swung round in his direction. Doreen obviously was very much upset. Her face was colourless, even to the lips, her eyes were wild and desperate. His mother on the other hand was flushed with the temper that flashed

out like his own. Conal alone looked as he always did.

Pat's arrival produced an uncomfortable silence. At last Julie addressed Doreen, with a fair show of calmness.

"You'd better go to your room and have a rest. I'll see to the breakfast. But you'll have to wait at table to-night. I can't get another girl at five minutes' notice."

"Don't get another girl yet, please, Mrs. Donahue," Doreen begged, and her voice sounded taut, as if it might suddenly snap. "Let me stay on for a bit, till I've thought of something. I can't go home. I can't face my father. He'd kill me if he knew. He always says he'd kill any daughter of his who got herself into trouble. And I believe he would, his temper's that terrible. . . ." Her words sent Pat's memory back.

"Nonsense," Julie broke in brusquely. "He couldn't kill you. He'd be taken up for murder. You'll have to go home. Where else could you go? I can't keep you here much longer. . . . Have some sense now."

Doreen clasped her trembling hands; she was past caring for appearances; she seemed oblivious of Pat's presence.

"Please, Mrs. Donahue, you speak to him . . . he'd listen to you . . . he said he'd stand by me. . . ."

Her words trailed off lamely before Julie's dominant wrath.

"You're not to bring these dreadful accusations against a guest in my house. I don't believe them. You've no right to say things against . . . that gentleman. You and your boy-friends . . . !" She snapped out the last exclamation with contempt, as if she'd never laughed over Doreen's love affairs nor teased her about her succession of admirers.

"But it was him . . . you ask him . . . he can't deny it. Why, Pat'll tell you about the night I went up to his room for the chocolates. That was the first time . . . and the first time I ever. . . . It was my birthday. You ask Pat. . . ."

"I won't have Pat brought into this," Julie declared. "He's too young. You're not doing yourself any good, Doreen. I've told you you'll have to go—and I mean it."

"But my father. . . ." Doreen broke down helplessly. "You don't know what my father's like," she wailed. By now Pat had recalled the tone. It was Tiger's. Tiger talking to

the fat policeman. How dreadfully scared people were of their fathers. He was glad he wasn't scared of his.

As he thought thus of his father, his father did a surprising thing. He crossed over to where Doreen stood, and put a hand on her heaving shoulder.

"Don't cry, Doreen," he said gently. "I'll go along home with you. You can leave it all to me. I'll tell your father. . . ."

"You keep out of it," Julie told him, very displeased at the way things were shaping. "It's got nothing to do with you. If you start butting in, everyone will begin to wonder if you're the man. That would be nice for me, I must say. . . . Go along now, Doreen. It's getting late and Pat wants his breakfast. Try to pull yourself together," she added sharply as the sobbing girl departed.

"Is Doreen going to have a baby?" Pat asked in a matter-of-fact voice, taking his place at the table and helping himself to a cereal.

Julie tried to dismiss the matter.

"It's nothing to do with you, dear. Hurry up with your breakfast or you'll be late for school. In fact we'll all be late. I'll fry you an egg."

Pat helped himself to milk and sugar with great liberality.

"Don't try to put me off, Mum. I wasn't born yesterday. I know how babies come."

"So he does, Julie; I told him," said Conal, also taking his place at the table. Pat smiled. His father had told him little he hadn't already known. Hadley and Jem had seen to that.

"It's hardly a subject we can discuss at the breakfast table," and Julie busied herself with the preparation of breakfast, disapproval of her husband's methods evident in the set of her lips and the line across her forehead. "Besides," she added, as she brought Pat's egg and bacon to the table, "it's a woman's business. I don't need any help in dealing with Doreen."

There followed a few minutes of silence. Conal broke it by asking suddenly:

"How old is the child?"

"What child?"

"Doreen, of course."

"How should I know?"

"You don't know!" Conal pushed back his plate, and stared at her with a strange intentness. "It's your duty to know. You take a girl into this house full of men, and don't ask her age. That's criminal."

"It's not a house full of men. I'm not a man, am I? Or Miss Sagood? I can't help it if the girl hasn't any morals. There's a type that's born bad. They always go wrong sooner or later."

"I don't accept that theory. We're all of us born with great, potential powers for good." Conal spoke forcefully, as if his own deepest affairs were involved. "Given happy circumstances we grow to be strong in wisdom and virtue—frustrated and miserable, we turn aside and pursue false gods. . . ." He rose with abrupt, uncontrolled impatience. "This happened in our house. Don't you realize our responsibility? It was for us to see that the child was happy, protected. . . . If she's under age——"

"She's eighteen," Pat contributed. He heard his mother give an audible sigh of relief.

"There you are, Conal. She's old enough to know what she's doing."

"If she'd been less, by God! I'd have had the law on that swine."

"What swine?" Pat asked interestedly. "I haven't heard yet who's the father of Doreen's baby."

"Oh, Pat!" Julie remonstrated, embarrassed, not by the facts themselves, but that Pat should know and comprehend them. The crude topics of existence she had always avoided in his hearing, under a mistaken assumption of a beautiful innocence which had not been his since babyhood.

Conal however, was constrained by no such reserves.

"She says it's Traynor—our noble Alfred the Great," he said.

"It's not, then!" Julie refuted the charge indignantly. "Mr. Traynor's a gentleman. He wouldn't take up with a common little thing like Doreen. It shows her cleverness, trying to put

it on to a man with money—but we know she had boys all over the place.”

“I think it’s Mr. Traynor,” said Pat. His parents regarded both him and his remark with amazement. Pleased with the effect of his words he finished up his breakfast complacently.

“How can you say that?” Julie demanded.

“I got eyes, haven’t I? Not like some people.”

“If it’s true,” said Conal slowly, “it only bears out what I’ve long suspected—that Traynor wants kicking into next week.”

“You can’t prove anything. And you’d better be careful not to offend him.”

“Why should I?” Conal was beginning to work himself up into one of his rare rages. “Hasn’t he offended us? Hasn’t he offended every decent person who breathes the same air with him? Do you think Doreen is the first—or the last—of his conquests? It’s a sacred duty to purge the earth of this scum.”

“Are you going to tell him that?” Pat inquired.

“Among other things—yes. I’ll give him some information about himself that’s going to surprise him.”

“Do you think he’ll stand for it?” And Pat mentally estimated the relative strength of the stalwart Mr. Traynor and his thin, stooping father.

“It won’t worry me if he doesn’t. I’m going to teach him a lesson.”

“That’s the stuff, Conal. Knock his block off,” Pat agreed excitedly. “I’ll stand by you.”

Julie who had long been trying to edge in a word, now succeeded.

“Don’t forget that Mr. Traynor pays me forty-five shillings a week. And that almost covers the rent. If we force him to leave, we’ll only be hurting ourselves. . . . You couldn’t make it up to me, Conal.” There was truth, and bitter truth in her words, and in the look which accompanied them—a long look, in which she laid before him her inability to antagonize her best boarder, and the reason. But Conal strove to disregard it.

“That we should have to deal with scoundrels, and dance to their piping, for a few miserable shillings!” he exclaimed.

“It’s slavery! It’s damnation!”

"You insult him—and it'll cost us just forty-five shillings a week." Mercilessly Julie drive it home.

Pat watched his father. He sincerely hoped that Conal would stand to his guns. Hadn't he won the D.S.M.?

"If you decide to fight our Alfred you might wait till I get back to-night." A sudden glance at the clock sent him sharply to his feet. "God! I'm late. All this talk. . . . Comes of having girls in the house. . . . But remember, Conal. If you wait till to-night I'll be your second."

"Don't be afraid, I'd never fight in the morning," Conal answered reaching for the day's newspaper. "The morning's no time for a fight: a man's got to work up his fury with a little Scotch."

VI

Returning home about five, Pat found his father sitting in the front lounge in a state of semi-intoxication.

"My fury's getting up," he told Pat, in the thick, slurred voice which sounded so different from his usual speech. "I'm going to teach our Alfred that all his dirty money can't buy him the right to trample on defenceless human beings. . . . Another time he'll have to consider more carefully before he shows an innocent child the road to disaster. . . ."

"Good on you, Conal," Pat answered. For a moment the rights and wrongs involved were in abeyance; they were as nothing compared with the pleasant prospect of a knock-out. Conal went up a hundred per cent in his estimation. The old boy was a fighter still, thank God. This would be something to tell the boys.

He found Doreen in the kitchen preparing the vegetables for dinner. Much as she wished to dismiss her, Julie could not dispense with her services until a substitute had been found.

Pat went to the cake tin, and took out two chocolate cakes and a slice of gingerbread. As he ate them he glanced surreptitiously at Doreen. She was not crying now. She seemed

apathetic, and her shoulders drooped more than ever as she leant over the potatoes to peel them. His eyes, against his will, rested on her figure. He was ashamed of his curiosity, but he could not help it. Surely it must be apparent when a girl was expecting a baby. There must be some sign, some indication; to his knowledge, he had never before beheld a pregnant woman. They must look different. But he could detect no change in Doreen. Her waist was as narrow, her hips as spare, her body as underfed "as a film star's". Of course, the stars didn't want babies because they spoiled their figures. Pat had read that in some American journal. Doreen's figure didn't appear to be spoiled yet. Perhaps, though, without her clothes to hide it——

"Well, what are you staring at?" Doreen challenged him defiantly. "You came into the world like that yourself, you know."

Pat blushed, and looked away.

He did not find it a very edifying thought. The boys made jokes about it, and he made jokes too, and they laughed uproariously, as if procreation were an enormously funny business. But when you came closer to it and looked at it apart from the ribald comments, it wasn't really so amusing. It was a pretty serious thing. And not particularly attractive.

He thought of those nights. Doreen waiting in her cheap finery to take up the supper-tray—and then the closed door and the silence. It all came to this: an illegitimate baby, no, call it what it was, he'd used the word often enough when it hadn't meant anything—a bastard, conceived behind that door between ten o'clock and midnight, and all due to the fact that Mr. Traynor, by reason of his wealth and Julie's favour, was privileged. . . .

"You could have told your mother about him asking me to go up to his room for them chocolates," Doreen was saying. "As far as that goes, he asked you to get them for me. It might never have happened if you'd——"

"You can't blame it onto me," retorted Pat indignantly, but his conscience gave him a nasty prod. He remembered his own part in calling Mr. Traynor's attention to Doreen's man-less state—and Conal had said they were all responsible. . . . "You could have said 'no', couldn't you?" he went on, thrusting

aside the unwelcome sense of his own participation. "You've got a mind of your own, I suppose. . . . Anyhow, you went back for more—night after night. Think I don't know that?"

"You know?" Doreen stared at him, a gleam of light behind her tear-blemished eyes. "Your mother doesn't believe it was him. Or—" she corrected herself with an innate perception "—she doesn't want to believe it. You tell her. She's the only one can make him stand by me. You tell her what you know, for God's sake, Pat!"

Pat saw himself dragged into the ugly business, and he shrank from it—but it wasn't only cowardice. He knew his mother too well not to understand that she would do anything rather than antagonize the star boarder. His hands in his pockets, he started for the door saying as he did so:

"I don't know nothing. And it's not my show."

Doreen followed him with surprising swiftness, and came up so close to him that he saw both the fire and the water in her eyes.

"She wants me to go because she's jealous. She wants every man in this house for herself. She can't forgive me for taking Mr. Traynor away from her. She won't admit it. She pretends she doesn't believe it was him . . . because she likes to think he's hers. Every one of them—the nice young foreigner, too. . . . She's jealous of me . . . because she wants them all. . . ."

"Shut up!" Pat shouted. He caught her by the shoulders, thrusting her back roughly into the room. "Shut up! Think I'll take your part after that? Of all the bloody lies I ever hear. . . ." He slammed the door violently, before he should hear the rest of her indictment.

He stood on the back porch, waiting for his hands to stop shaking. Lies, he muttered, lies, lies . . . of all the bloody lies. . . .

He quarrelled with his mother, she often made him furious, but she was his mother. . . . "You came into the world like that yourself, you know . . ." Why did he remember that? His father and mother had been married, and married people were meant to have babies. But, whatever way you looked at it, it was a similar process. He had quickened to life in the same

way that Doreen's nameless child was quickening. It was just the same. The thought repelled him.

And what more had Doreen said? That his mother wanted every man for herself. . . . It was vile. But was there any truth in it? If there were, he hated the world. He hated every process of nature that had brought him into it. He was sickened, disgusted. He'd have nothing to do with it. Girls, babies, sex—love, even. They all meant the same thing, and he'd have none of them. He would steer clear of any entanglements. He would be free—a man unto himself.

Softly from an upstairs room, he heard Keller, the musician, playing. Pat stood still, and listened. . . .

VII

After dinner Conal went up to fight Mr. Traynor, and Pat went with him.

Julie, mindful of the forty-five shillings paid in advance each Monday, had used every threat, every plea she could summon to make him desist. But Conal was not to be moved. He had made up his mind to fight Mr. Traynor, that seducer of women, and fight Mr. Traynor he would, or no woman would be safe again beneath his roof.

However, when she saw how befuddled he was, she suddenly terminated her objections. He couldn't do much harm when he was like this, and Alfred would understand and be lenient with him.

Pat also knew doubts as to the wisdom of imbibing whisky before a fight. One ought to be cool and alert, not dazed and unsteady. He did not recognize the necessity Conal found to bolster up his nerves with a little Dutch courage—or, in this case, Scotch.

They mounted the stairs, the "second" well in advance. At the top he waited for his father's less agile limbs to bear him upwards. Mr. Traynor's was the front bedroom with the balcony; the door was closed, but Pat, by good scouting, knew

he was within. Conal leaned back against the balustrade.

"He's a big man, Traynor," he mused.

"It's not size that counts. It's guts—and a strong left drive," Pat told him consolingly. He proceeded to give his disheartened parent some instruction on the art of boxing, with plentiful illustration. Being on the extreme edge of the landing, and Conal having difficulty in standing upright at all, it was only by a narrow margin that they didn't both topple over and fall down the stairs.

"All right, I'll remember. But I wish you were going to take him on instead of me," Conal sighed, when his son had imparted all the tricks and dodges he knew.

"I couldn't tackle a man twice my weight. Besides, it was you who got your back up with him—not me."

"Yes. I must think of that poor kid. Her life ruined before she's twenty. And no sympathy from the righteous whose conventions are always being outraged, and who welcome every chance to make an example of those unfortunates whose wrongdoing has found them out. . . . It's the unlucky ones who are found out, Pat. . . . The world is full of the blackest sinners whom we revere, simply because they've been clever enough—lucky enough, not to be discovered. . . ."

"Wouldn't it be better to tell all that to Mr. Traynor?" Pat suggested. "It would probably be better for him than for me. I haven't done anything wrong—this time."

"Very well; I'm going."

So saying, he turned resolutely down the passage, threw open Mr. Traynor's door, and on entering, slammed it shut, so that Pat, much to his chagrin, was left on the other side. He considered making an entrance by force, but then thought that his presence might cramp his father's style. So he hung about the landing instead, awaiting the outcome.

He hoped Conal would give a good account of himself—something he could boast about. He would be glad to hear that he had inflicted on Mr. Traynor some permanent disfigurement. The man was getting too familiar. He had a proprietary air, as if Eastridge and everything in it belonged to him. Pat resented it. Yet he knew whose fault it really was. His mother had given

Traynor too much licence ; and he was paying for it at the rate of forty-five shillings a week.

Conal was not long in Mr. Traynor's room. As abruptly as he had entered it five minutes before, so he took his departure. Indeed he gave the impression of being thrown out. Unsteady before, it was now all he could do to totter weakly to the top of the stairs, where he sank down panting. In whatever fracas had occurred, he had lost his stud ; his tie was askew and his collar nearly off ; while his hair was disarranged, his mild eyes alarmed. Tenderly he passed his hand across his jaw as if it pained him. Pat, with a groan, sank down beside him on the top step. It was obvious who had dealt the strong left drive, and who had suffered its impact.

"Did you get one in first?" he inquired, with melancholy hope.

"Not exactly. But I called him a few names. Nice strong ones I learnt in France and at sea."

"And then he hit you?"

Conal's momentary elation flickered out.

"Then he hit me."

Mournfully they sat and surveyed the passage below, Conal nursing his bruised face. Quite close to them, but out of sight, Keller was playing.

"He's good, that fellow," Conal remarked.

"De Courcy Traynor?"

"No. The Austrian piano-thumper. Your mother's latest."

Pat recalled Doreen's words. If it were true, how could his father stand for it? Was he so little of a man, so poor a thing as that? But perhaps it was an agreed thing between them, perhaps his father too. . . .

"Conal," he asked, with an abruptness that concealed diffidence the while he looked down the well of the staircase to the passage below, "did you . . . did you have other women . . . before you married Mum?" It was easier to say these things when Conal was more or less hazy with drink, and would have forgotten by to-morrow.

"All experience was mine, boy. I drank deeply of life. There were women—and there was loneliness . . . the loneliness that

arises when the flesh is sated, and the soul starved. . . .”

“Yet you were angry with Traynor for it.”

“I wasn’t angry with Traynor for being a sinful human creature. I was angry with him for picking on a stupid girl ignorant of the world’s ways, and wrecking her future. With all my crimes I cannot have it brought against me that I disregarded the sanctity of ignorance or innocence, which are pretty much the same thing. . . . Beware, Pat, how you take it into your hands to overthrow and destroy the happiness of another—even another fool. Then you will never have to say to yourself: It’s my fault. That cry is unanswerable. That crime must be expiated only in agonies of self-abasement and degradation.”

As was usual after drink Conal was strangely voluble: the words seemed to pour from him, fighting for utterance; Pat could hardly follow everything he said, but one word caught his ear, the word “love”.

“I’m never going to have a girl. I’m never going to be in love,” he said hastily. “I don’t want anything to do with it.”

Conal grinned. “We all say that at fifteen. I did myself. I was going to be a monk, or failing that, a missionary. I set my course for the celibate life.”

“I’m not religious . . . but I don’t have to bother with girls. I can get along without them.”

Conal helped himself up by aid of the bannisters.

“At fifteen we can rule the earth,” he said. “No laurelled Cæsar at the height of his power . . . not Alexander flushed with victory, can behold a world his to conquer quite as splendidly as a boy half-way through his teens. . . . Later on, however, you’ll want your socks mended and your kettle filled and your hearth swept. . . . There’s an anti-climax for you!” He staggered slightly as he started to descend. “What will you do then?” he muttered, his voice slurring badly. “In five years, in three, in two perhaps, you’ll have a different story to tell . . . you won’t be denied your inheritance . . . even a conqueror must offer up his spoils somewhere. . . .” His words faded as he went unsteadily down to the floor below.

Pat, looking after him, knew he lacked everything a fighter

needed. He had neither strength nor stamina ; it was a wonder Mr. Traynor hadn't knocked him cold. But consideration for Julie's feelings would influence him in letting Julie's husband off as lightly as possible. From thinking his father a hundred per cent, Pat's estimation sank to a much lower figure. His most fertile invention could hardly make of this an event worthy to relate to his friends.

He found he was listening to the music of the "Austrian piano-thumper", that, subconsciously, he had been listening to it for a long time—ever since Keller had come to live in the house, behind everything he'd been doing lately, a background, insidious in its half-acknowledged appeal. He could have laughed at himself. Music was sissy, soft, decadent. . . . Yet he tuned in to it more and more on his wireless. And it wasn't dance-bands or Bing Crosby either—he was getting a taste for good stuff : Beethoven, those Russian chaps with the awful names, Wagner. . . . This wouldn't do at all. . . .

VIII

One evening about a week later he was on the stairs again listening to Keller, and Keller stopped in the middle of a phrase and opened the door suddenly.

It was spring and the day had been warm ; Keller was in his shirt sleeves and his hair was ruffled. He and Pat looked at each other. Pat got quickly to his feet, feeling sheepish and compromised.

"I suspected I had a listener."

"I wasn't listening. I was only—having a rest. It's been a hot day."

"Oh ? You often 'have a rest' when I'm playing, don't you ? I can always feel when someone is listening to me. It's like an extra sense." Keller spoke good, careful English, with only a suggestion of a foreign accent ; Pat realized it was the first time he'd ever spoken to him. But, annoyed at being caught listening, he answered shortly :

"This is my home. I can't help it if I've got to pass your room sometimes."

"Yet you're in a separate wing, aren't you? You don't have to come up here."

Pat flushed.

"I'd like to know what business it is of yours where I go!" he exclaimed angrily. "Australians aren't used to being spied on, no matter what tricks you dirty foreigners like to play on each other." He turned to go downstairs, but, by a swift movement, Keller reached the head of the landing first, and barred his way. For a moment Pat wondered if he were going to start a fight, and, like a seasoned pugilist, he cast an appraising eye over a possible adversary: the tall figure, slim and upright like a duellist's, with wide shoulders, and long, spare limbs.

Keller did not strike him, as he had expected, but he made Pat feel his superiority of height, and also the dominance of his glance and bearing; he succeeded in making Pat quail before him. As if that were all his intention, he stepped back, saying quietly:

"I should be very angry with you for that. I belong to a civilization much older than yours. While your country is immature and crude, mine has a history, a culture and a tradition."

"History isn't everything. A new country has to make its own," Pat retorted, recovering from the unpleasant discovery that this man, this damned foreigner, had the power to intimidate him. "We're just beginning ours."

"That's true. But beginners need teachers. You shouldn't scorn the lessons that have been learnt long before this land was even thought of."

"We don't have to be taught lessons by people from Europe. You haven't worked out a way to have peace yet. All you think of over there is scrapping. And we've got to come and get you out of your muddles every twenty years or so." Pat felt he'd scored.

Keller looked grave.

"The world's torn with strife and suffering," he said, "and it isn't only Europe that must bear the blame. Here, in this new country, there are slums, poverty, inequality. I've seen it all.

Just as I saw it in Vienna, where my home is—was.” He made the correction on a sharply-drawn breath. “War grows out of despair—and despair and poverty go hand in hand,” he continued after a slight pause. “Perhaps one day you—if you are a good Australian . . . but more, if you are a good citizen of the world . . . will find a solution to it. But until you do, I don’t think you’re in a position to criticize.”

Pat was reasonable enough to know that this was true and right—but he wasn’t going to admit that he could be convinced so easily.

“That’s all very well. But why should we have to get you Europeans out of the messes you land yourselves in, every little now and then?” he asked.

“Why? Because you have a debt—an immeasurable debt you can never fully repay,” Keller replied, with quick passion. “As I said just now, you owe us your civilization and your traditions of law and freedom. You owe us the whole heritage of western art—music, painting, sculpture. That’s what you owe us.”

“Thanks. We’ll do without it,” Pat said coolly, having recovered his confidence. “We’d rather make our own art and traditions and be left in peace.” He strove to pass, but Keller put himself once more in his way. Again he wondered if he would be made to suffer for so much boldness. Keller was frowning, and his aspect was forbidding. Then his expression changed, and he laughed.

“You young barbarian, you don’t know what you’re missing, cut off by seas and oceans from the cradle of your race! Every stranger regarded with hostility, every importation from abroad a cause of suspicion. Your tiny nation is the universe itself . . . and everyone from outside is—‘dirty foreigner’.”

Yes, he was bitter. Pat felt he’d gone further than he should have done, but he wasn’t going to apologize. He had never apologized to anyone in his life, and he wasn’t going to begin with a damned foreigner. The man should have stayed in Europe if he was going to find fault with everything away from it.

“We like to do things our own way. And we don’t want people from overseas trying to put us right.” He hoped that

there the discussion would conclude, but Keller wasn't done with him.

"Yes, I know. That's why I called you a barbarian. You'd destroy the art treasures if you could."

"I might." He used his most insolent tone—the one that made Mr. Traynor and his unfortunate teachers detest him. When they heard it they left him alone. But it appeared to have a different effect on Keller.

"Don't you know what a chance there is for you—in this country you're so proud of? No inherited fears, no racial suspicions or enmity. . . . A friendly continent, natural wealth, security. Why, it's all in your voice. I recognize it as the voice of freedom. Every word you utter is unafraid, confident. . . ."

It was a new idea. It came to him clearly and strongly as Keller spoke. Yet again it wasn't so new. Rather was it a springing up of something long and deeply bedded.

Keller watched the sullen expression leave his face. He smiled.

"Well, my Philistine, are you still going to deny that you were listening to my music?"

Very ungraciously Pat answered him:

"All right. I was listening. I hadn't anything better to do."

"Good. And it wasn't the first time, was it?"

Still more concessions? "No. It wasn't the first time."

His points gained, Keller relaxed.

"I won't call you a Philistine any more. Because you like music. You like my music. So you should. I am good at it. But music is not made well by one man alone. I played in an orchestra once in Vienna . . . and in Bucharest, Prague, Warsaw. That is fine. You have a wonderful sense of working with others, who, like you, are striving to produce something harmonious and beautiful. You get a feeling of comradeship . . . a faith in others without which you couldn't achieve perfection."

"It must be something like being in a football team," Pat suggested.

Keller raised his eyebrows, and then laughter lit up the dark eyes Julie had found so tragic.

"Yes, you British child—it's like being in a football team," he said.

Pat didn't like the sound of the appellation.

"My name's Pat," he said.

"Yes, I know. But your friends call you St. Patrick, don't they? I heard one of them call you that the other day . . . I wondered if you had attained canonization for your outstanding qualities of virtue."

"No fear. It's only because my grandfather was Irish."

"Perhaps it's as well. I haven't had much experience with saints. I think they'd make me rather uneasy." And Pat noticed he looked a little strange as he spoke; it was a look he was to see again and fail to interpret, until long afterwards.

"You're going to learn to play," Keller said abruptly. With a slightly inperious gesture he indicated the half-open door of his untidy, manuscript-littered room, as if he were bidding Pat to enter.

But Pat hung back. "Rats!" he retorted inelegantly. "You'd never get me to play a note."

"If I'd supposed that, I wouldn't have wasted half an hour over you. My time is valuable." Keller had an artist's deep respect for himself and his talents, but somehow it wasn't objectionable. "Before the war I used to teach music," he added.

"Teachers and I," Pat responded, "are enemies. Besides you'd want to get paid, wouldn't you?"

He spoke rudely, but Keller passed it over.

"When I make an offer, I'm not looking for payment," he answered quietly.

Pat considered.

"Could you teach me in three lessons?" he asked. "I couldn't be fagged with it if it took any longer."

"I'll try," Keller responded, perhaps too recklessly. Apparently this thought struck him, for he added: "If you'll try too."

Pat followed him in.

IX

A couple of weeks later Doreen went home. In spite of Julie's strenuous opposition, Conal went with her to lend her his support

in the dreaded interview with her father. It was, however, support without much moral backing, for Julie had browbeaten him into promising beforehand that they would accept no sort of responsibility for anything which might, or might not have happened in their house. The girl was no good, she maintained, and Conal was a fool to have anything to do with the affair.

What occurred at the interview with Mr. Phipps was never divulged. On account of this, Pat surmised that it must have been unproductive. The only remark Conal made about it was on his return, when he declared wrathfully,

"We send our children to school to be educated. Why doesn't someone open a school to educate the parents on their duties to their offspring? Why do they bring them into the world at all if they're incapable of helping them up again when they stumble? The love that went into their making seems to wither and die as soon as the new-born infant wails its first protest to living."

And he thought how differently he reacted to parenthood, when each day of Pat was a fresh instalment in an enthralling tale, the perusal of which had never failed to engross and delight him during nearly sixteen years.

After months of neglect Julie was turning again to Mr Traynor. Keller had proved a disappointment. Although she would not admit it, she found him intellectually above her, nor had he availed himself of the pleasant little flirtation she silently offered. (And he a foreigner, too, and she had always believed that foreigners were outrageously susceptible to female attractions.) He had told her much about his travels, his music, only a little about his home, but then she could understand his reluctance to depress her. Underneath his studied gaiety, she could sense his unhappiness. Perhaps, womanlike, she would not have minded being taken behind the gaiety—after all, a relationship that does not advance into intimacy is bound to become unsatisfactory. When she got used to his foreign deference, his charming good manners, she began to realize he had nothing more to offer her. Her efforts to break down his reticence were expertly parried.

One day Conal asked :

"How are you getting on with the lad from Vienna?" (He took a sardonic interest in his wife's little "affairs".)

Julie's forehead creased as she considered the question.

"I don't know. He seemed very nice at first. But now I feel I don't quite understand him."

"That's hardly surprising, my dear. His musical education is probably at a more advanced stage than yours."

"We don't talk only about music. He's told me a lot about Vienna and Prague and those other big cities. But I think he's worried about his family. He hasn't heard from them for ages. By the way he looks when I ask him questions I think he's afraid they may be dead."

"Is he married?"

"No. No, I don't think so. He would have said. . . . I don't think," said Julie, with a sudden flash of discernment, "that he likes women very much."

"Oh, but surely he'll make one exception. . . ." Conal's eyes twinkled, ". . . at Eastridge," he concluded gallantly.

Julie couldn't help laughing, although the laughter was tinged with annoyance: she did not like admitting defeat.

"At any rate he's teaching Pat to play the piano," she said. "And I hope at the same time he'll teach him some manners. He could do with them."

"Pat's all right," Conal replied easily. . . .

From Keller, she turned back with something like relief to Alfred Traynor. Here she was in a world she knew—common-place, everyday conversation, excursions to the races, betting, evenings at the theatre, with just that thrilling, tantalizing suggestion that he admired her, found her attractive, would have gone a long way further with her if she'd let him. With Alfred she called the tune—or at least he allowed her to think she did; there was no sense of a brooding, withheld mind as she occasionally experienced during her association with Keller.

Traynor seemed bent on establishing a return to their old, happy friendship which the incident with Doreen had nearly destroyed. He could not have been more attentive. He bought her flowers, he took her to dinner at Menzies on her birthday—with Conal's permission. He always made a point of asking

her husband's permission before taking Julie anywhere. Perhaps, as Conal remarked, Traynor had had unfortunate experiences with husbands before, and he was determined to be careful not to transgress again.

It was on the occasion of the above-mentioned dinner party that Alfred saw fit to dispel from Julie's mind any suspicion she might have harboured about his responsibility towards Doreen.

"Your husband had quite the wrong idea, you know. There was nothing between myself and the girl. Nothing at all. I did give her a few sweets on one or two occasions, but simply because she seemed so pathetic and lonely."

"Oh, I know Conal lost his head. That night he went up to speak to you he'd been drinking. I was terribly ashamed of him."

"You needn't apologize to me, Mrs. Donahue—Julie," said Traynor, dwelling with some tenderness on the name. (He only called her Julie when they were alone; before others they were strictly Mrs. Donahue and Mr. Traynor.) "I know what sort of a life he gives you—but I mustn't refer to that. I only want you to feel that I attach no blame to you—ever . . . I'm afraid he annoyed me a little that night, because what he said was so unfair. But I certainly didn't mean to strike him. I was sorry immediately afterwards—for I knew it would hurt you." He gave her a very kind look.

"It didn't hurt me a bit," Julie answered. "I thought it served him right. I told him he'd made a mistake. That girl was just the type to land herself in a mess."

Mr. Traynor looked down at his plate for fear his next words accompanied by a glance might embarrass his companion.

"If she was really—in trouble, as they say," he remarked, "it wasn't by any act of mine. She knew plenty of men, didn't she? Her boy friends, as she called them."

"Yes. That's exactly what I told Conal. It was probably the grocer's boy, Alec. She went out with him a lot for a time."

"Oh, the good-looking chap with the moustache?" inquired Traynor with the most innocent expression in the world. "Every time I see him I say to myself: 'That's the answer to

the maiden's prayer. 'That's the sort of man who'll solve our population problems.' "

Then, feeling that this remark was a little coarse for the general high tone of the evening's entertainment, he hastily changed the subject.

Julie was not deliberately condoning vice. In her heart she had her suspicions, but above them she piled practical necessities, until they were almost hidden, and only returned during sleepless hours to plague and taunt her.

Conal had spoken of the slavery, the damnation, of money, but she knew far more about it than he did. Forty-five shillings a week nearly paid the rent. Had Mr. Traynor committed murder she must—if it were possible—overlook it, at forty-five shillings a week! Once or twice, when she and Conal were first married, they had been practically destitute. Stephen had sent them cheques, and she, being inexperienced, had let Conal handle them. He had cashed them at once, and spent the money with the wildest extravagance; then he had sat down and talked of the divine humility that went with poverty, and extolled the joys of the simple life.

The money he received from his writing went the same way—whisky and tobacco for himself, costly presents for Pat, generous, stupid gifts to anyone who could spin him a good enough hard-up yarn. That was why—by fair means or foul—she must circumvent him, she must stand in the way of his recklessness. The trip to Central Australia, now. He still talked of it.

Julie was not without selfishness; she had demanded that holiday in Sidney as her due. But then for years she had gone without the things she wanted. She it was who had had to find the means to support, not only herself, but her husband. Later, in poverty and uncertainty of the future, she had had both to bear and to maintain their child. Yes, she would always be bound by the slavery of money—because she was afraid of the cold shoulder of the cold world. She had always been afraid of it. To ensure safety from it, she had married Conal. And when that sanctuary proved unstable, she had been driven back on her own resources.

She was not going to allow Conal to destroy the careful structure she had built with so much anxious pain.

It was only to be expected that there were times when she felt like making the final break : in every practical thing, Conal's views were widely divergent from hers, while the barriers which held her from treading the lofty, spiritual heights of his superior intellect were quite insuperable. . . . But then her thoughts would return her to that one thing they had in common, the possession from which neither of them could part, their only stake in the future, the one reality in a miasma of dreams and disappointed hopes—their son.

X

It took Pat many more than three lessons to learn to play the piano with any degree of proficiency—but the strange thing about it was : he didn't mind. He was falling more and more under the spell of something fascinatingly new and outside his previous experience. Partly, was it the music—the music of the masters in which Keller instructed him, and partly Keller's own music, the expression of his happy memories and also of his tragic nostalgia for his lost country.

When Keller talked of his home Pat felt ashamed : ashamed of the things he'd said to Keller, ashamed of his carefree life and the untroubled skies of his free country. No enemy trod his earth—the threat was so far away, beyond the rim of the world, where it could neither be seen nor felt. So far away—yet Keller could both see and hear it—it lay in the shadows behind his eyes.

For Pat, as for Julie, Keller opened a door into a different world—and the door opened to music.

At first he had been surprised that Keller should seek the company of a schoolboy half his age. Being a foreigner it was to be expected that he would not have many friends, but he seemed to know a number of musical people whom he met in the course of his work. He was also on good terms with Mr. Jordan and Mr. Lester, two of the younger lodgers, who sat with him at table in

the dining-room. Pat had seen the three in animated conversation, sharing bottles of beer, and generally enjoying one another's company ; yet when the evening meal was done, Jordan and Lester went on their way together, and Keller waited for Pat.

Pat decided it must be music that forged the link between them. Music was Keller's life, but, because Jordan and Lister preferred other occupations, Keller cultivated Pat.

Yet Pat could not claim to be particularly advanced in this or any other art. His knowledge, his experience of music could hardly have been more slight. But it was possible that this very fact was the one which appealed most to Keller. It gave him scope to influence an immature taste, and develop in Pat a discriminating attitude to music. And Pat's appreciation did develop, for Keller was a subtle, unwearied instructor ; under his guidance an inherent aptitude grew.

One day Keller said to him :

"Let's hear you play something through. . . . Play . . . er . . . some Chopin. . . . Impromptu in Sharp C Minor. . . ."

Pat played it.

"You're improving," Keller commented, "but you're holding something back, *mein lieber*."

Pat's attention was caught by the strange word.

"What did you call me ?"

"*Mein lieber*. As you would say—my dear."

"But, look here, you can't call me that. It's sissy," Pat expostulated.

"It doesn't mean anything. It's just the same as if you called someone old boy or old chap. It means no more."

"I don't like old boy or old chap either. And I'd be obliged if you wouldn't call me names in German or any other language," Pat said with determination. "I'm sick of being a barbarian one minute, and your dear the next."

"Very well," replied Keller, "I won't call you anything but your name. . . . Definitely you're improving, Pat. If only you'd not keep such a tight hold on your emotions you'd be a good deal better. You can't play the piano in the same way as you tackle a problem in arithmetic. If the feeling

isn't there, you must learn to use your imagination. . . ."

"What a hell of a business music is!" Pat exclaimed impatiently, springing up from the piano stool. "I didn't bargain for all this sentimental twaddle about feeling and imagination. I like to listen to something good—I'll admit that, although the blokes would flay me alive if they heard me say it—and I don't mind trying my hand at playing it. But I've got to draw the line at anything more."

Keller looked at him steadily, a little smile playing about his lips.

"Why have you got to draw the line?"

"Why, because feelings are sissy—" He fell back on the old, childish word, "You can't—I mean, it isn't done—" he struggled, and gave it up.

"You're afraid of your own kind?" Keller suggested. "The condemnation of those dull, uncultured friends of yours?"

Pat flushed.

"No, I'm not. And they aren't dull," he added aggrievedly.

"Perhaps not. But they *are* uncultured . . . You're capable of better things, Pat, if you'd give yourself a chance. You can't interpret music if you won't feel it. And the more you feel it the better you'll be. Come along. Try it again."

Pat backed away.

"I can't. It's no good. I can't play. And I don't know that I want to."

"An Australian boy shouldn't say can't. I thought you were going to show the world what great fellows you are," teased Keller.

"We'll do other things. Not music. Australians don't give a damn for music—really."

"Don't generalize, Pat. Take a particular case. Your own. You know you like music very much. Like a great many of your countrymen. You told me once you Australians were going to make your own art. But if you can't put yourselves into it—it's going to be rather poor stuff. Listen. I'm going to play you something of mine. It is myself speaking. My true self. You know we all have two selves: the one we show the world, full of pretence and conceit, that shows off and looks for applause,

and the real self, the one that hopes and despairs and loves—the one you're ashamed of. . . . I'm not ashamed. I'll show you. . . ."

Keller played for an hour. He did not stop nor speak, but went on from one composition to another. Some gay, some sorrowful, they followed different forms and patterns, so that no two were alike: they were full of tenderness and passion.

Pat knew enough to know it was good and beautiful music. He knew enough to know he was privileged to be allowed to listen to it. He became so utterly absorbed in it that he forgot himself. It was with a sense of surprise when he realized that Keller had ceased playing and had turned to look at him, was waiting for him to speak.

Clearly something was expected of him, some remark, some expression of appreciation, but, for the life of him, he could find nothing to say. It was Keller who at last broke the long silence that had fallen between them.

"I see now I made a mistake about you. You shouldn't be asked to interpret complex and sorrowful emotions. You should play only happy music. Why not? You've been happy all your life."

"I liked your sad music too."

"Yes. You like to listen to it. There's a difference between listening to another's experience—and having it yourself. If I were to tell you of the things I've seen and heard of in my country, you might be a little saddened, but it would be no more than a tale to you. I can play it for you. But you can't play it for me. . . . Someday, perhaps . . . but, no, I shouldn't wish you anything but happiness."

"You've—lost—people, Mr. Keller?" Pat asked uncertain whether he should put the question.

"Why don't you call me Max?" Keller suggested with a soft sort of warmth in his voice. "I'd like you to. . . . Yes, I've lost people. My father . . . died in a concentration camp after the Nazis had invaded Austria."

Pat stared at him, appalled. Once he had made out quite a good case for the Nazis. Now the fabric of the universe seemed suddenly unsubstantial.

The war in Europe came to an end. There was rejoicing, but for Australia a darker menace still clouded the northern sky: Japan had not yet been forced to capitulate, and until that happened peace was still only a word.

Undisturbed by the fate of nations which were so soon to be confronted with the birth of destruction and the atomic age, Pat celebrated his sixteenth birthday. He made plenty of fuss about his first shave (not yet a necessity). He went on studying for the Leaving Exam. And he spent most of his spare time with Keller. For Keller not only taught him to play. What Pat considered was even more practical, he helped him with his homework.

To this last arrangement Conal offered a few words of patient reproof.

"He won't be sitting beside you when you go for the exam at the end of the year, you know."

"Oh, I'll be O.K. when the time comes," Pat answered coolly. "I can do it if I have to."

"It's a bad habit—and a bad principle," Conal persisted. "I can do it if I have to—but as long as there's someone to do it for me, I'm not going to be bothered."

It was not often that Conal expressed disapprobation of Pat's arrangements. He didn't mind the music, and he didn't mind the exclusiveness of the new attachment that left him so little of Pat's society. But what he distrusted was this dependence.

Julie was not so critical. True, she had failed to make an impression on Keller, and the failure rankled, but she would still be the first to admit that a cultured, artistic contact was just what Pat needed. Let Keller coach Pat by all means—and incidentally improve his manners! She would make do with Alfred Traynor.

Pat's own feelings about Keller were mixed. Perhaps the strongest was flattery. He could not doubt that Keller liked him, and the knowledge was pleasant—for despite his disability of foreign birth, Keller was certainly intelligent, gifted, not without a sense of humour—above all, mature, with all the glamour of

adult experience. Besides, Pat sincerely enjoyed his music. It awoke in him a realization of what he'd nearly missed.

On Sunday mornings he walked with Keller in the neighbouring Fitzroy Gardens, grey now with the heavy mists of midwinter; on Sunday afternoons they went down to the Yarra bank where, for one day in seven, Freedom of Speech became a reality, and any man whose voice possessed sufficient volume to command a hearing might expound his views on Socialism, religion, or the general mismanagement of the world in general and Australia in particular.

Keller was interested in the opinions expressed—interested and a little scornful.

"They preach revolution—but they won't practise it," he commented.

Pat was inclined to disagree—because the speakers thundered so realistically, and because the word revolution excited him.

"I don't know so much about that, Max. They only want a leader. You wait a bit—until the capitalists overstep the mark. Then you'll see."

Keller shook his head.

"Your working class hasn't been pushed around enough. There's poverty here, disparity of wealth—but not starvation. It's starvation that breeds revolution. Besides, you haven't a proper ruling class to turn out. I know what I'm talking about. I've seen the makings of it in Europe."

A hoarse voice broke rudely into their conversation.

"We don't want no revolutions here! Them Reds is all murderers!"

The interjector was standing shoulder to shoulder with Pat: a thin, weedy fellow with a scarf knotted round his throat in place of a collar and tie; he cast a baleful eye on the man who was addressing them: a Communist, known as Riverside Reg, undersized but voluble, who now shouted wrathfully:

"We do want a revolution—a bloodless one, if possible. But we've got to throw out the old firm to put our fellows in."

His supporters raised a cheer, but the thin man was not yet defeated.

"That's all my eye. How are you going to start?"

"By gettin' rid of yeller mongrels like you!" Rag answered, lowering himself to personalities, which were almost, if not more, popular with his hearers.

"Wackø, Reg; good on you," a voice approved. "Stick to it, you beaut!"

"The gentleman—if one can call him that—has asked me how we'll begin," Reg continued, lifting a hand for silence. "I'll tell you. First we'll get our men in the right places. Vote 'em in, if we can. Then, when they want to start another war for British Imperialism, American big business and the status quo . . . as, mark you, they will, my comrades . . . then our blokes'll up and tell them to go to hell!"

He glared at his audience, removed the black-rimmed glasses he wore over his pale, fanatical eyes, rubbed them methodically with a grimy handkerchief, then, having replaced them, he spat out with a violence of which he seemed physically incapable, and which made everyone jump:

"The Fascists are still in power, and they're cookin' up another war for us workers to fight. Only Communism can save the world!" And back he went to reiterate in different words the same conclusions, interspersed by lively, fairly good-natured insults and interruptions.

Pat glanced at Keller, standing so quietly among this motley throng: Keller, who represented for him the real thing, whose father the Nazis had shot for his beliefs, who had seen the makings of revolution that wasn't just second-hand doctrines and imagined tyranny, who belonged to a world of tribulation and idealism and lost causes. . . .

"Why don't you speak to them?" he asked.

But Keller had already started to move away.

"They won't listen to me."

"How do you know they won't?"

"You to ask that!" Keller smiled. "Australians don't like being put right by foreigners. The adjective, I think, is dirty—when it isn't stronger."

Pat grinned.

"Break it up, Max. I've found out that you wash quite often. In fact more than I do."

"What an admission!" Keller said gaily; then, with an undertone of seriousness, he added: "I've hopes of you yet, Pat."

"Hopes' for what?" Pat wanted to know, but Keller didn't answer.

They turned back along the north side of the Yarra. The city was lightly stretched behind them on the sky-line, ethereal with mist and the dim afterglow of sunset; before them lay the green-grown turf, and the sluggish river, which moved imperceptibly below the pale stone bridges, newly spanning its ancient course.

At length Pat spoke.

"Are you a Socialist, Max?"

"Not the ugly ranting, not the catch phrases . . . but the betterment of the poor everywhere, the end of inequality, who couldn't but wish it? Plato's ideal state . . . Plato was a Communist, you know? But those fellows of yours would think I was mad if I quoted them *The Republic*. . . ." Keller paused, and then, in a curiously flat tone he answered Pat's question: "Yes, Pat, I have my particular brand of Socialism—of Communism, if you like. Once it meant so much to me I gave up my religion for it.

"When the other things went, I started to build a faith of my own. I wanted to unite the artists of the world—no less. Of course my music took me to many lands—but besides that, I had another purpose for going. A real, driving purpose. I thought if we stood together—we, the gifted ones, the elect . . ." He paused and held the word, as if he wondered whether it were the right one. It was because he hadn't absolute command of the language he was speaking that Pat let the word pass. It was perhaps too vain-glorious, but it did not offend him. (Indeed, he was not a little flattered by being considered worthy to share the confidence of one of the race of the elect.)

"Why do you say *had* a purpose? Do you mean it's gone?"

Keller nodded.

"It was a dream the war killed. And the fact that, being a foreigner, many distrusted me . . . even looked on me as an enemy. . . ."

"It was a misunderstanding, Max. They didn't know what you were trying to do," Pat protested. He didn't like the sombre note in Keller's voice.

They had turned away from the river and were going up through the park towards Eastridge. It was nearly dark. "True, they didn't know," Keller agreed. "Austria had been incorporated in the Third Reich, so they lumped us all together: foreigners and enemies. It wouldn't have helped either if they'd known that my mother happened to be born a German."

Pat stared at him as well as the fading light would allow. He'd read about the Germans in the newspapers—some sort of monstrosity, hardly human. Could it be that half Keller's blood—Keller, the composer, the charming companion—was tainted with this inexorable dye? He had an idea that the disclosure should make him turn away from Keller; but, strangely, it made no difference.

"A German! D'you mean a Nazi?"

"No!" The rebuttal was violent. "She is a musician, gifted, beautiful. She has no politics, but the politics of humanity. More than anyone else, she inculcated in me the doctrine of world brotherhood. She it was who sent me abroad to try to save it." He laughed bitterly. "As if anyone can save anything in a world at war!" After a pause he went on more quietly: "But I don't know. Sometimes I feel it's the only thing. What do you say, Pat? Would you join my cause?"

But to say the least, Keller's cause seemed to Pat vague, unsubstantial. The new era of the proletariat was far more of the earth, something that Pat could fathom. This world brotherhood—this unification of artists—seemed as remote as the young star freshly kindled in the western sky.

"Why me? I'm not an artist."

"You appreciate music. That's enough. Appreciation is enough. Otherwise there would be too few of us."

"Then I belong with the . . . elect!" Pat asked lightly, with a suggestion of laughter.

"I wasn't sure at first. I was afraid you hadn't any imagination."

"So you called me a barbarian and a Philistine. No one

ever called me names before and didn't get dinged for it. . . . And now I'm just the opposite. I've got imagination. I'm one of the Chosen." He used a bantering tone that contained a faint element of derision. He was afraid Keller was getting too serious, and he felt it was high time he snapped out of it.

Keller didn't answer at once. Because it was too dark to see his face it was only by the sound of his voice that Pat knew he was angry.

"You deliberately put yourself out of touch with everything. You've got your eyes fast shut—and your heart too."

Pat knew that Keller was trying to get at him, as he'd tried to do with his music—to bring out something in him Pat didn't want brought out. When he didn't speak, Keller went on:

"You resist me. Always you hold back. Why? We're friends, aren't we? Are you just . . . being British—or is it that you're not capable of anything more?"

"What do you want me to say?" Pat asked at length, feeling that the conversation was moving towards some unknown objective—and all at once he both liked and didn't like it.

Keller gave a short laugh. They were in sight of the lights of Eastridge; a grey pall of smoke from the fires hung before them in the moist, still air.

"I can't decide something about you, Pat."

"What?"

"Whether," said Keller, "it's a confirmed paganism—or just the spirit of God asleep."

He opened the gate, and they went in without another word.

XII

On his way home from school the following day, Jem Watson tackled him about Keller. Jem, the last of the old gang, was still Pat's closest friend. This was partly due to habit and memories of past association, and partly to Jem's unswerving loyalty to his former boss. Jem's good qualities, however, were nearly discounted by two great disadvantages—he was the possessor

of a sister, and he was, besides, a dull fellow, lacking any sort of a personality; he often bored Pat to death. For some time lately he seemed to have been nursing a grievance. Now he gave voice to it.

"I saw you with that foreign bloke yesterday. It makes me sick, the way you've given your old friends the go by. I don't know how you can suck up to a long-haired thing like that."

Insensed by Jem's tone, Pat retorted hotly:

"His hair's no longer than yours. Besides, I'm not sucking up. He started it by—" He nearly said "by teaching me to play", but remembering in time that Jem would scorn such effeminate diversions, he changed it lamely to: "By asking my opinion."

Jem, who was out to make trouble, chose to put a sinister complexion on this.

"So he started it? You look out, Pat. He's after something."

His words registered notably; Pat felt the blood rushing to his face.

"Damn it, what should he be after?"

Jem looked at once knowing and mysterious.

"Don't say you're as green as that. You look out for him. That's all."

"I don't know what you mean. If you're trying to be filthy, you'd better shut up. Otherwise I'll have to bash you." But the colour in his cheeks had not subsided; Jem noticed it.

"Don't be mad, Pat. I'm only warning you . . . like a friend. Everyone knows what these dirty foreigners are—"

"You mind your own business, you young devil, and I'll mind mine," Pat cried, and he turned off into a side street, swiftly and abruptly, to put space between himself and Jem, and the unpleasant speculations Jem's words had aroused. He tried to dismiss them, but they hung on persistently, dogging him like relentless pursuers. It was all a vile invention of Jem's, he told himself. Jem was jealous because Pat had dropped him for Keller. Well, why the hell wouldn't he? Jem was uninteresting, heavy, stupid—Keller was, oh! all the things that Jem was not.

Yet even as he tried to convince himself, a whole crowd of small suspicions, like tiny darts, shot across his reasonable

explanations . . . little poisonous things which darkened his admiration of Keller, which dragged down the fine, brave figure that (in spite of his alien connections and queer ideas) he'd set up in his mind of Keller—Keller's unaccountable partiality for him, the half-teasing, half-tender way he spoke to him, his expressed wish that Pat should exhibit more feeling . . . these things took on a startling aspect, and the more he thought of them the more ugly they became. Even his mother had noticed—yes, he recalled it now—his mother had remarked that Keller didn't seem to like women very much. That meant . . . Pat knew, as his mother hadn't quite known, what that meant. . . .

He was revolted as he had been over Traynor and Doreen. That he, who had renounced sex, should have walked straight into the bewildering mesh of this distorted thing. . . . It made him sick and miserable. . . . If only he hadn't got to like Keller so much it wouldn't have mattered. . . .

Perhaps, though, he was wrong. Perhaps he was attaching too much importance to what lay behind Keller's foreign manner. Perhaps it meant nothing, nothing at all . . . or was no more than the manifestation of his artistic nature. Artists weren't like other people. They spoke extravagantly—their very ordinary human contacts were coloured with emotional embellishment. It was possible that Pat was utterly mistaken.

Yet from that day he avoided Keller. He made excuses for not going up to his room, he began extensive and ostentatious repairs to his wireless in order to have a feasible reason for his avoidance. For he had made a discovery, and it was worse than anything Jem had said or implied (although very possibly Jem had put it into his head). It had come to him suddenly one night that if Keller wanted what Jem said he wanted, Pat wouldn't mind complying. He hadn't known he could have such a thought, or such a sensation. Somewhere within him there was a stranger, who suggested this shame, this dangerously pleasant shame, to him, as he lay wide-eyed and sleepless. . . . And it humiliated him, all the more because he didn't really know about Keller. Keller might turn from him, disgusted, if he knew Pat's thoughts, as Pat, in his saner, daytime moments, was disgusted.

So it wasn't only Keller he was avoiding. It was also the stranger who was himself.

XIII

The following weeks were pretty bad ones. For the first time in his life he was unsure of himself, he had doubts and apprehensions, he was at odds with everything and everybody. If this were part of the process of growing-up, he didn't like it: his pride in his increasing physical maturity dwindled when he considered some of its implications. . . .

He dreaded his parents' questioning. Every day he expected Conal to say, as he had once said to Julie :

"How are you getting on with the lad from Vienna ?"

Also he remembered Conal's remark on the occasion of Tiger's defection :

"So Tiger went the way of all flesh ?"

He might at any hour, with even more appropriateness, make a similar observation about Keller. To meet this eventuality, Pat had ready a string of lies and inventions, in which he had little faith, for he doubted that Conal would swallow them. The constant expectation of some sort of inquiry made him nervous and irritable, so that his mother declared he was studying too hard and needed a tonic to "put him on his feet again."

She showed signs of curiosity over his estrangement from Keller—but it was not her questions Pat feared, she could easily be put off. Conal was a different proposition.

However, strangely enough, Conal displayed no curiosity, nor did he ever put the awaited question.

Avoiding Keller proved exasperating. It was difficult to live in a house with a fellow and not, every now and then, meet him face to face in the passage or at the gate, but somehow he accomplished it.

The week-ends he filled in at the Watson's, making it appear that he had pressing affairs to discuss with Jem. Unfortunately there was a catch to this : and the catch was Jem's sister, Violet.

Violet, who had never replaced Pat in her affections, decided that his many visits were not unconnected with herself. His brusqueness, therefore, only served to increase her ardour—she couldn't really believe that he was indifferent to her, especially as he came to her home so often, and she put forward every effort to divert him and attach him to herself; her determination and fidelity against Pat's stony wall of opposition were nothing short of admirable, and worthy of a better cause.

At last her constancy met with its just reward. Pat had actually invited her to an evening at the pictures. Violet's joy was intense. She had been right about him. He had liked her all the time. It was only his shyness that had made him so unapproachable. Now, obviously, he had conquered it—hence the invitation.

Could she have known why Pat had asked her she must have endured a disappointment as acute as her present joy. With newly awakened perceptions, it had occurred to Pat that his acknowledged detestation of the opposite sex might be construed disagreeably; people might say there was something "funny" about a boy who didn't like girls. It had been so innocent a thing, so frankly admitted, he'd been glad and proud to say it, as if the fact had made him a real "man's man"; but now the uncertainty he was finding even in the most harmless things fastened itself on this too. The fear of it haunted him. He had not known that life was so complicated.

He might with profit have talked it over with Conal. (And Conal would have told him that all these things that so worried and distressed him were no more than phases in the slow passage of the human animal to full growth and understanding: part of the long, protracted maturing which is one of the differences between man and the lower creatures.) But shyness prevented him. He just couldn't bring himself to talk about something which he felt marked him as different from his fellows.

To allay any suspicions that people might have formed about him, therefore, he took Violet Watson to the pictures. With what he afterwards felt was mistaken chivalry, he allowed Violet to choose the film. She, of course, chose a highly romantic piece, which featured her favourite, Charles Boyer. Before it

was half over Pat was bored and restless ; bitterly he regretted his folly in wasting both time and money with such nonsense. He vented his irritation by commenting impolitely, in loud whispers, on the action and situations in general, and on Mr. Boyer's technique in particular—thus giving offence not only to his companion, but to the people sitting in front of him, who turned round and attempted by freezing glances and decorous hisses to silence him. Violet, much embarrassed, begged him to desist. Fiendishly he disregarded her quiet appeals, and grew more and more outspoken until a disgruntled patron summoned the usherette. The girl turned her torch on him, the sudden light making him blink like an owl—and requesting him either to hold his peace or else leave the theatre. Rising, Pat accepted the second alternative. Violet caught his hand.

"Please, Pat, don't go," she implored. "You're spoiling everything."

"You needn't come," he answered, shaking off the detaining hand with insulting haste. "You see it out by all means. I just can't stick it."

"Oh, Pat, and it's so lovely," Violet wailed, nearly in tears. "You've no taste—no taste at all."

"Sh-h-h!" It was a combined, furious protest from twenty or more unseen spectators, who probably shared with interest Violet's opinion that Pat had no taste. The usherette turned her torch up the aisle to indicate the route so many were anxious to see him take. Accordingly he took it, sauntered out without hurry, whistling under his breath as he went, and pleased with himself for the first time for ages. After a momentary hesitation, Violet followed him.

Outside the theatre the streets were swept by a light, misty rain which blew slantwise before the south wind ; after the close warmth of the interior the air was chilling ; Violet shivered.

"Go along back," Pat advised. "No reason to waste a good seat."

"How can I, Pat, without you? It wouldn't be no fun. You've spoilt it all. And I thought—I thought you liked being with me."

The scorn in his eyes burnt her like the touch of fire.

"I never liked a girl in my life," he said, and made off into the rain with the obvious purpose of deserting her. Undecided what to do, Violet stood there, until the Commissionaire, a stout fatherly man, with kindly inquisitive eyes, who had watched and listened, came over to her.

"Might as well see the finish, missie," he suggested. "You'll enjoy the last part—Boyer looks real 'andsome, he does . . . and Olivia wears a gorgeous set-up . . . all thingummies all over it. . . ."

The appeal was too strong. Squaring her shoulders to show her disregard of any animosity members of the audience might have towards her, Violet went back and saw the picture through to the final passionate embrace, which consoled her somewhat for Pat's inexcusable behaviour. But she left the theatre vowing she'd never speak to him again.

By the time Pat reached home, wet through, his satisfaction with himself had diminished. He knew he'd been a brute to treat Violet like that. He was damned sorry, and damned sick of himself. Everything had been bloody lately. He sneezed four times. If he got a cold that would just about put the lid on it.

XIV

A possible explanation of Conal's unusual lack of interest in his son's activities was the news of the conclusion of hostilities with Japan. There were celebrations, services of thanksgiving in the churches, the leaders of the nations delivered themselves of the correct pronouncements, they gave credit to those who deserved it, they expressed suitable sympathy for the bereaved. . . . It made Conal feel old and cynical and no longer a part of the world he lived in. He felt that all the hatred and the pain that had caused the war were still present, driven underground, perhaps, but still festering, still breeding new hatred, new pain.

He felt sorry for Pat's generation that must work out their manhood's destiny in this age of the atom bomb. He felt they

lacked ideals, but he didn't know what ideals they would want, what ideals he could give them. But Pat wasn't worried. He had an answer.

"Socialism'll save the world," he told his father confidently.

"Do you really believe it, Pat?"

"Too right I do. I've been reading up Marx. He had the answers. Besides what else is there?"

Conal thought about it.

"Once I would have agreed with you. Once when I was young. Now I can't. I know that no form of government can save the world unless it's administered without self-interest, without animosity, without hope of material gain. This world had got too materialistic, Pat. Socialism, Democracy. . . . They're just words . . . names which may stir faint echoes, but can never be militant again until . . . the—the spirit returns. The spirit may return. You may still lead the revolution I missed . . . I hope so, Pat." And he smiled vaguely, as if hope in him burned very low, but was still not quite extinguished. . . .

After the long winter of war, spring was returning. ("You can't beat the spring," Conal thought. "It's the greatest reminder there is of continuity . . . that, and the youngsters.") The elm trees in the park were powdered with tight, tiny leaf-buds. Again in the cold dawn the birds sang.

It was Conal's tasks to bring in the mail. One day he noticed among the rest a letter with a foreign stamp and postmark. It had Keller's name on it, and had apparently been sent on from a number of addresses. Conal turned it over thoughtfully. Since he had come to Eastridge a year ago, Keller had received no overseas correspondence. The veil of war having lifted over Europe, this letter in all probability brought tidings of intimate, perhaps tragic importance.

Conal shook his head over it and placed it with the other mail on the hall-table, ready for the inmates of Eastridge when they should return that night.

During the day, however, he continued to think about it. As far as he knew Keller was as good as friendless. There were times when Conal had been a friendless stranger in an alien land. He knew what it was like. From the plentitude of his

sympathy, he quite naturally experienced Keller's feelings.

Conal had noted the sudden, warm friendship which his son had formed with Keller. He had seen, too, the eclipse. To all outward appearances a disinterested onlooker, he had, with an eye keener and surer than either his wife's or Pat's, sized Keller up. Undoubtedly a gifted young man—Conal had listened from afar to his playing—who had the makings of a fine musician, an original composer, except for some fundamental weakness which Conal felt struggling for mastery in Keller's music, which he saw in Keller's face. A young, tormented god, Conal thought, for there was something classical in Keller's refined features . . . a god who had plumbed the nether depths and had returned without Eurydice. It was in the melancholy eyes, the too-careful set of the lips, the soft, sensuous voice. They all bespoke it.

Conal had often looked for signs of viciousness, but he did not find them. All he found was that inherent weakness which might have contained an element of danger except that it was too deeply graven in the lines of resignation almost beautiful in its acceptance. . . .

On the night the letter came, Julie complained to him in the kitchen that Keller had come down very late for dinner, and had then scarcely touched what she had provided.

"I'll take him his coffee," Conal said. Pat looked up at that, and then quickly returned to the book he was reading at the table.

Conal found Keller sitting alone in the dining-room. He was pale, and the set of his mouth was even more marked than usual.

"Here's your coffee," Conal said. He had waited at table in emergencies, so Keller was not surprised to look up and find him there. "Cold night, isn't it?" he suggested conversationally, offering Keller a cigarette paper and his tobacco pouch.

Keller didn't seem to notice them—nor to have remarked especially on the state of the night. As he said nothing, Conal asked: "Anything wrong?" He sat down opposite Keller at the small table. "I couldn't help seeing there was a letter for you to-day. Was it from"—he hesitated—"home?"

A line cut itself into Keller's forehead, but otherwise his expression was unchanged.

"If you can call it home when there's no one left who were once your family—then I've a letter from home."

Conal turned his gaze from the painful steadiness of Keller's eyes, and began to roll a cigarette.

"It was as if the war put a screen between me and mine," Keller went on quietly. "I heard nothing. Now the screen has lifted, and I know what it concealed. . . . Death. . . ."

Conal flipped the ash from the cigarette into Julie's best table-cloth as if unconscious of the domestic crime he was committing.

"Your parents . . . ?" he asked.

"My mother. My father died before . . . before the war. My sister's gone, too, now. Many friends. My mother persuaded me to go away because of my music. So my music saved me," Keller went on, a little emphasis creeping into his even smooth voice. "It almost makes me hate it. I feel as if I could never play again.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Conal protested, looking up swiftly. "Music is so precious. It has no frontiers."

Keller flashed a look at him—a live, flaming look out of a dead face.

"I thought that once. Art, the only civilizing influence in the world . . . the only unity. But it's a lie, Mr. Donahue. People only wanted one sort of music. And it was the music of the guns. . . ."

"The music of the guns," Conal pondered. "I wouldn't say that. There are creative impulses abroad in war-time. Obviously. The birth-rate rises. The arts are stimulated. Allied with destruction there is also a strongly marked tendency towards Preservation . . . almost as if the two were complementary."

"That may be. The only truth for me is that while they . . . at home . . . suffered danger, persecution, and finally death, my music saved me."

"You mustn't despair, old man." Conal spoke strongly. "To despair is to be less than one's experience. Your music was worth saving. They thought so. You must think so. Besides, even a mistaken faith is better than none . . . and who

shall judge if it is mistaken? I might have despaired myself many times if I hadn't been going to Central Australia."

"Are you going to Central Australia? When? I hadn't heard."

Conal smiled rather oddly.

"Not just yet. It'll keep no matter how long I am."

Keller looked puzzled, but his own thoughts were enough to occupy him.

"If I could find that faith again. . . ." He broke off. "I tried to make Pat feel it," he said.

"Oh, Pat. . . ." Conal raised his eyebrows, and humour entered his light blue eyes. "To work on Pat is to plough rough ground."

"I don't know." Keller considered it. "I've felt in Pat sometimes a strength . . . a sort of promise. . . ."

"It isn't hard to see promise in the very young. I think we see a shadow of something we have lost—the expectation of to-morrow. But it is hard to realize that Pat's to-morrow isn't yours or mine." Conal rose. "If you feel you'd like to talk to someone, Keller . . . well, besides being able to spout myself, I can also listen." And he gave a quaint, upward twist of the lips, which was not quite a smile.

Keller gave him a rapid, grateful glance.

"Thank you. You've been very good to me. You all have."

Conal denied it gruffly.

xv

That night Keller went up to Pat's room. He had never done it before. Pat heard his step on the wooden staircase, and thought for a moment it was his father, but then he remembered Conal had gone to a meeting of the R.S.L. His heart beat suffocatingly when he realized who it was.

His cold had hung on persistently, and as it was holiday-time and he had no lessons to prepare he had gone to bed early, and lay reading. He put down his book, and his eyes widened as he watched Keller bend his tall head to pass through the low door-

way. Confused, foolish things went through his brain—he felt curiously defenceless, alive to the danger within and without, yet at the same time glad that they were going to have it out, one way or the other . . . Or rather, one way. There was only one answer he could possibly give Keller, if he asked, if he wanted. . . . “Have you learnt to say no, yet?” . . . Unbidden, the words came back from the concealed part of memory. Years ago Conal had said that to him. Had Conal envisaged a scene anything like this? “Have you learnt to say no?” He’d say no all right when the time came. . . . But just for a second, while he watched Keller advance, he was once more aware of the tiny, feminine side of his prevailing maleness that whispered with so insidious, so sensual a voice that he would find pleasure in being mastered by Keller.

In silence Keller stared down at him as he lay, his head resting on his crossed arms. The silence was maintained so long that Pat’s nerves refused to stand the strain, and he heard himself say, as he had not meant to say :

“Hullo, Max.”

Their friendship, was, after all, so much a habit, that, unthinkingly, he fell back into the way of it.

At last Keller spoke.

“I want to know why you’ve been avoiding me.”

Beneath his scrutiny Pat’s gaze wavered ; he began to play with the pages of his book, flipping them over nervously. It was a stormy night. Outside he heard the wind howling round the attic, and the rattling of the window in its flimsy socket ; a sudden gust of rain pattered fiercely against the glass, as if it sought admittance. Then it retreated, thwarted, and for a moment there was quietness.

“Why have you been avoiding me, Pat?” Keller asked again. He rested his elbows on the iron railing of the bed-foot, and leant on them.

“I haven’t.”

“You don’t have to lie to me.” Keller spoke softly. “I thought we’d got past . . . silly pretences like that.” He paused, and then he came and sat down on the side of Pat’s bed. Idly he picked up the book Pat had been reading.

"*Das Kapital*; Karl Marx." He smiled wanly. "Light bed-time story, eh? How far have you gone?"

"Oh, about half way," Pat responded airily, which was something of an exaggeration. "I've got to get through it. It's the handbook of Socialism, isn't it? If only," he added ingenuously, "it didn't send me to sleep so easily! You've read it, of course?"

"Yes. But I was a good many years older than you when I did. What a pity we couldn't have studied it together. . . ." He laid the book aside, and looked about him. "So this is your room, Pat. Your mysterious sanctuary. I like it. Your books. Your wireless. Your work bench. All of them part of your personality. And if one should come back years afterwards and find you gone, there'd be something of you still here, you know." He spoke with the light ease of manner that had won Pat in the beginning. It was as if he were refusing to delve into the deeps that often obsessed him, that drew him towards a gravity Pat had no wish to share, which bewildered and troubled him. "What are all those books?" he asked, eyeing them there in the shadows into which the bedside lamp did not penetrate.

"Oh, adventure yarns, sea stories—most of the things I read when I was a kid."

"But now you prefer Marx? What about Shakespeare?"

"You know I've had to swot up *As You Like It* for Leaving. And I don't like it. Awful dope that Orlando was. . . . I'd have donged him with pleasure if I'd had half the chance."

"I won't call you a Philistine because I promised not to," Keller said meaningly. "But we won't count the stuff you've had forced down your neck."

"Throat, Max—not neck." Keller so seldom made a mistake in his fluent English that Pat was all the more pleased to correct and that might occur.

"Very well, throat then," Keller agreed. "It's what you read by your own choice that counts."

"I like *Macbeth*," Pat offered tentatively.

"Out, out, brief candle . . ." Keller said, and then a

shadow seemed to drift across his face. "Why did you say that, Pat?"

"Well, you asked me. . . ."

Keller sat silent a moment.

"Your father talked to me to-night," he said at last. "He was very kind. He knew I'd had a letter from . . . Vienna."

At once Pat felt awkward.

"Not bad news, I hope?"

"Not good. How could it be? I didn't expect it would be. But no one can really tell beforehand just how much bad news or good is going to affect them. We—we can't forecast an emotion." There was, however, no emotion in his voice, which was quiet and had in it again that curious note of understatement, as if he had schooled himself to discuss his personal tragedy with the disinterestedness he would have displayed in talking of a stranger; if he had wounds he was not going to show them; least of all was he inclined to enlist sympathy. Pat was grateful to him for not putting too fine a point on what another might have made an agony. "Your father was very kind," he said again. "It was nice to have a human contact again. It's been a long time since we talked together, Pat." His voice was now very soft, with an underlying note of sadness which worked on Pat as if it were a melody caught by his inner ear. "Why have you avoided me so persistently?"

Pat looked away, across at the rain-spattered window. When he didn't answer, Keller put another question:

"Were you afraid I was getting too fond of you?"

Well, he might have known Keller was too honest to evade the issue. But he wished he hadn't. He wanted Keller to get off his bed and go . . . and not come back. He didn't want this thing between them, he didn't want this conversation that made his stupid heart rise to his throat and beat there. His hands were clammy, and he trembled because he thought Keller was going to touch him. And if Keller touched him the horror and the beauty of it would be too much to be borne.

"That's it, isn't it, Pat?"

"I'd rather not talk about it," he heard himself say,

in a stifled, insecure voice. "Please . . . I'd much rather not. . . ."

After a slight pause, Keller asked :

"Will you let me explain something?"

Still Pat looked away from him.

"Not to-night. I don't want to talk about it to-night. I——"

"There's only to-night, *mein lieber*." But he got up. "Very well. If you don't want to hear we'll leave it alone. I won't force unwanted explanations on you . . . But you're not being quite fair."

Pat's head came round quickly.

"Why aren't I being fair?" he asked sullenly.

"You said you didn't want to talk about it."

"I don't."

"Then it's no use asking questions." Keller went over to the door. As he opened it, the storm entered with a vehement fury of rain and wind. For a moment he stood there, looking back. "Good night, St. Patrick," he said. Then the door closed behind him, and the storm retreated too.

He was gone at last, gone into the darkness of rain and tempest, and Pat was left alone, safe and warm. But he was far from being at ease, far from being happy. There had been something peculiar in Keller's parting words, in his use of the nickname he had never used before. It would be ironic if Keller were attributing him with those "outstanding qualities of virtue" Pat had once denied he possessed. Who was he to judge Keller, or anyone else? He'd felt like a beast himself, and behaved like a coward. What was the explanation Keller had wanted to give him? Surely he could have listened to it, if only for the sake of the good times they had had together? Keller had said he wasn't being fair by refusing to listen, and neither was he. He'd been so concerned with his own tumultuous emotions that he hadn't given a thought for Keller, who had had some sort of unhappy news, who was friendless, lonely. . . . Conal had been better than he. Conal, in the simple decency of humanity, had held out his hand in common kindness, when he had seen that Keller needed a hand. While he. . . . Never mind, though. He'd put it right with Keller to-morrow. There was

always to-morrow. With the comfort of that thought, he fell asleep.

XVI

Before he came down the following morning, Keller had gone out, so Pat had to wait all day for a chance to put things right. Just after dinner Conal was called to the telephone, where he was kept for some time. He came back to the kitchen looking white and upset.

"The police want me," he announced.

"What for, Conal? Murder?" Pat asked brightly.

"No." Conal's lips were a little stiff, and he seemed to have difficulty in articulating. "They want me to identify a body."

"Whose body?" Julie asked on a sharp breath.

"They don't know. That's why they want me. But they think it may be . . . Keller's. It was this afternoon they found . . . in the river . . . someone—they're not sure. . . ." His voice trailed off.

Julie stared at him wide-eyed, awestruck. But Pat came up to him.

"I'm going with you. I don't believe it's him. But I've got to know."

"Don't be a damned fool," Conal spoke roughly. "It would give you bad dreams for a month of Sundays—like it will me."

"But you were a soldier. You've seen dead men before."

"You expect to see dead men on a battle-field. You're hardened to it. After the first shock, it becomes the accepted thing. But not this. I'm sorry I've got to do this." And he went out.

"What a dreadful thing for him to do!" Julie cried suddenly, as though the full horror of it had only just occurred to her. "I do hope the papers won't make too much of it. The guests won't like it. That sort of thing's so upsetting. We've never had anything like it happen before."

"Damn your bloody guests!" Pat exclaimed fiercely, and then the fire went right out of him, and utter weariness took its place.

He sat down on a chair by the table to wait for Conal to come back, and rested his head on his hand. Julie, who was about to scold him for his disgraceful language and bad temper, refrained at the sight of him, and went up to Keller's room to see if he'd left anything there which might indicate his intentions.

Pat was alone. In his mind he was going over and over again that last interview with Keller. Was there anything in any of Keller's remarks last night to suggest so stark an undertaking? He had offered Pat an "explanation", which Pat had rejected. If Keller were considering this act, this most final act, was not Pat's rejection of him at this stage enough to swing the balance? It was a grim thought. Keller had said he wasn't being quite fair. Surely, surely he might have listened to what Keller had to say . . . "There's only to-night. . . ." Had Keller said that? Yes, he had. What did it mean? Keller's last night of life. And he'd come to have something out, and Pat had turned away from him. . . .

It wasn't true. Max wasn't dead. He couldn't be. Why, only last night he'd laughed at Pat for reading Marx's *Capital*. People who could laugh couldn't be dead. . . .

Julie came back with something in her hand.

"It's a letter. I found it in Mr. Keller's room." She put it down on the table in front of Pat. "It's addressed to you."

They looked at it for a long time : almost as if it had dropped from the sky. Then Julie spoke :

"Aren't you going to open it?"

And after a while Pat did. Keller had written :

Dear Pat,

I am writing this to you straight after leaving you there in bed, and nearly asleep with your intensive study of Marx. You said you didn't want any explanations from me, but I don't want to leave you with an uglier picture of myself than I need. And God knows that when I've done what I intend to do to-morrow, it will be ugly enough.

I am very fond of you. You mustn't mind my saying it. It is also true that what I think you supposed me to be, I am. It is a misfortune to be born different from the majority. It is my misfortune. But the fact need not have intimidated you. Among many other hard lessons, I have learnt the lesson of control. Besides my feeling for you is a very real thing. That was your protection. And that was what I wanted to tell you.

I've written your name on most of my compositions. I want you to

have them. Some day you may publish them ; anyhow, do with them as you please. They're no more use to me.

Will you do something for me, Pat ? Then I will feel I've been an influence for good in your life. Don't be ashamed of loving beautiful things—art, music. The pioneering days are over. You don't have to be a backwoodsman in a hard, new land any more. You've got to build a culture. If you're in it, I'm in it, because of the music we made together, and because you're not quite the barbarian I called you.

MAX.

While he read he felt his mother's gaze on him. As soon as the words had passed before his eyes, she spoke :

"Show it to me, Pat."

"No."

"Show it to me. I want to know what's happened to Mr. Keller."

"He's dead."

"Does the letter say so ?"

"Among other things, yes."

"What other things ?" And when he didn't reply : "Why won't you show it to me ? I'm your mother. It's not right to have secrets from your parents. It's your duty to tell us . . . everything."

"You've no right to ask to see my private letters."

"No right !" Julie took him up with a short laugh. "I've every right. Who feeds and clothes you, I'd like to know !" Then she took a different tone. "You'd better be careful, Pat. If this man has got you into some political tangle, you'd better get out of it again. By some remarks he made I gathered he was a sort of Communist. He took you to some meetings, didn't he ?" Julie had always been afraid Pat would throw in his lot with the Communists.

If he'd felt better Pat must have laughed at suspicions so wide of the mark.

"I promise you there's not a word of Communism in the letter. He wants me to have his music. That's nothing to get alarmed about, is it ?"

"I saw he'd written your name on lots of those manuscripts of his . . . But if that's all he says, why won't you show me the letter ?"

"I told you. Because it's private." And he shrank from the mere thought of betraying Keller's secret, so honestly, yet so delicately expressed. . . . Keller speaking the words he'd been afraid to hear. . . .

While they were arguing Conal came in. He had a brandy-flask in his hand. Without a word he raised it to his lips, and drank deep and long. His colour was bad. Julie and Pat watched him in an agony of suspense. At last he put the flask down, wiped his mouth unthinkingly on the sleeve of his coat, and spoke :

"It was him all right. Poor chap. God! What a way to end it."

Julie made a little impatient motion; she seemed about to remind him, as Pat had done, that he had once been a soldier. Conal took these things to heart far too much. It was very sad, of course, but the man was really nothing to them.

"These foreigners. . . ." She left it unfinished, and shrugged her shoulders. "I'd better make some tea. You and Pat both look as if you could do with it."

Conal sank down and took another pull at the brandy.

Pat had a sudden vision of the deep dark water that had claimed Keller. The river he'd known most of his life, where he'd bathed with the gang and had fun in the sunshine of summer days, along the bank of which he'd walked with Keller himself in the afterglow of sunset and talked of religion and Socialism and all sorts of things . . . happy, light-hearted memories which would forever after be dimmed over with the sombre hues of dissolution. Silent, grimly distorting the fair shape of what had once been a man, the river flowed on through his mind, a river of death. . . .

"There will be an inquest," Conal said. "Don't move anything from Keller's room, Julie, till the police have been. . . ."

At that Pat felt his stomach turn over inside him. He was sure he'd gone pale. He knew the meaning of his mother's triumphant glance.

"I found a letter," she said. "It was addressed to Pat. I brought it down and gave it to him. He's just read it."

Conal raised his heavy eyes to Pat's face. He made no remark.

"I told him he must show it to us," Julie continued. "Now, of course, the police will have to see it."

"Will they, Conal?" Pat demanded, appealing as he always did in times of stress to his father's greater wisdom.

"If they know of its existence they'd be bound to ask to see it. If you suppress it you'll be withholding evidence which might be useful at the inquest. That's an offence."

They all considered it.

"It might be better if we didn't show it to them," said Julie after a moment. "If the man's got Pat to join the Communists we don't want people to know about it. . . . But we've got to know first what's in the letter. Make him show it to you, Conal, and you can decide. He's under age, and he's got to obey you."

Conal lighted a cigarette; then he looked across at Pat.

"He can do as he likes. He doesn't have to obey me. Wasn't he endowed by his creator with certain inalienable rights——"

"What's that, Conal?" Pat asked, his imagination immediately stirred. "I think I've heard it before."

"—That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," his father continued. "America's Declaration of Independence. The finest charter of human freedom in the world. Until Australia has one like it, we'll be a nation without a star. . . . And how can we begin it if we demand unwilling obedience? No, Pat, you don't have to show me Keller's letter. But you'd better destroy it, and shut up about it when the police get here."

His pale eyes held Pat's, and then they wavered away, and he returned to the brandy; he slouched badly over the table—a poor, broken thing, but his words did something to Pat, and he went out quickly. He told himself he had no use for Conal, that he was ashamed of him. But there was no doubt about it—Conal said things: things he was never, never going to forget. . . .

When he got to his room he found he was in tears—the first

tears he'd shed since he was quite tiny. It was funny to have to wait till you were nearly grown up to cry properly.

XVII

The day after Keller's death Pat came down to breakfast feeling most peculiar. It hurt him to breath deeply, and he was sure he wouldn't be able to eat anything. He couldn't remember such a thing ever having happened before ; he had, as a rule, a truly remarkable appetite.

When Clarice, the woman "over forty-five" who had replaced Doreen, brought him his usual heaped-up plateful of cereals, he deliberately played about with it, because he didn't feel inclined to do anything else. At least, with a great effort, he managed to swallow a mouthful or two. Then he pushed away the plate, saying as he did so :

"I don't want any breakfast to-day."

Julie was in the dining-room busy with some reorganizing, and it was to Conal who sat beside him that he spoke.

Conal stared at him. "You're sick."

"No, I'm not. I'm just not hungry."

"You're always hungry. So you must be sick." He felt Pat's hands. "You're burning hot. You must have a temperature. I'll get hold of somebody's thermometer."

Pat snatched away his hands.

"No, you won't. I don't want my temperature taken. I'm O.K."

Conal turned to Clarice.

"Have you a thermometer ?"

"No, Mr. Donahue. I haven't. I'm very sorry. But Miss Sagood has. She takes her temperature every morning."

"She would. . . . Go and borrow it for me."

"Righto. And I think you should take Pat's temp. He's that flushed. Hasn't looked himself for days—in my opinion."

"Nobody wants your opinion," Pat said rudely. "Wait till you're asked for it next time."

Clarice tossed her head and went off to do Conal's bidding. They did not speak while she was gone. Conal went on with his breakfast and his scrutiny of the *Age* while Pat played idly with his fork and wondered what was the matter with him.

Clarice soon returned with the thermometer and Conal removed it from its case and shook it down. He got up.

"Open your mouth," he commanded with a coolness worthy of a professional, all the more estimable because he was a long way from feeling either cool or professional.

Pat moved away.

"I tell you I'm all right."

"We can easily prove it."

Pat suffered the thermometer to be placed below his tongue, while Clarice watched the operation with so much interest that the toast was burnt black and she had to set to work to make more.

After the required period had elapsed Conal took the frail recorder of fate from between Pat's lips and held it in the grey light which came in through the kitchen window. He did not speak for a minute, and it was all Pat could do not to give utterance to the question which pressed so urgently for expression.

"Bed for you," Conal said at last.

"I thought he was crook," Clarice spoke with the air of one who can face calamity—other people's not only with fortitude, but also with a certain amount of enjoyment.

"I don't believe I've got a temperature. Show me the thing." He took it roughly from his father. The silver vein of mercury had passed the hundred and three mark. With a gesture of helpless fury he dashed it to the floor, where it lay shivered in fragments.

"Four and sixpence gone west," Conal remarked philosophically. "You'll have to pay Miss Sagood back."

"The damned thing's all wrong. I'm not sick." But the floor suddenly rocked beneath him, and he took hold of the table to steady himself. Conal caught him by the shoulders.

"Stop playing to the gallery, Pat," he said, quite sternly. "You've got to give in when you're licked."

Pat was so amazed at such unwonted severity that he allowed

himself to be guided from the kitchen and escorted back up the stairs he had only recently descended. With some opposition Conal got him to bed, and then went off to telephone the doctor. Julie was worried by the news but too busy to offer much assistance. Pat was not informed that the doctor was expected until that gentleman was well on his way up to the attic-room. As it was, he looked ready to leap from his bed and through the window when he saw the grey head and birdlike nose of the family physician at his door. The idea of being an invalid—weak and dependent—was utterly hateful to him.

"Well, young man, and what's this I hear?" Dr. Ross had a bracing, condescending manner which Pat detested. "High temperature. No appetite. We must look into this."

Opening his bag he took out his stethoscope.

"Now we'll try that old chest," he announced, fitting the appliance to his ear and sitting down by the side of the bed, "and those funny old lungs of yours. We'll soon see where the damage is."

At that Conal went white, and his hand tightened on the foot-rail.

"Don't tell me it's his lungs," he implored desperately, "anything but that!"

After he had sounded Pat the doctor turned to Conal.

"My dear fellow, of course it's his lungs. But don't be alarmed. It's not as bad as you think. Or at least not yet. Pneumonia. Hundreds recover from it every day—and it leaves no lasting effect."

"Will it be—long?"

"That depends on his constitution, which appears to me splendid—and the amount of care he receives." He beckoned to Conal to follow him, and the two went out of the room together. "I'd better get him into a hospital," he said as they went downstairs. "Mrs. Donahue has her hands full enough. She couldn't take on the added work and responsibility of nursing him." For Dr. Ross, who had often attended Julie, had a more than fair idea of the method whereby labour was distributed at East-ridge.

"I don't want him to go into hospital," Conal said. "I'll look after him myself."

Dr. Ross raised his eyebrows. Obviously he had a poor opinion of Conal and Conal's ability to rise to an occasion such as this.

"And what experience of nursing have you had, may I ask?"

"I was a year at sea. I often helped to nurse sick members of the crew. And I assisted many wounded men at Gallipoli and in France."

The doctor pursed up his lips.

"Well, if you think you can do it, I suppose I can't prevent you from trying. The hospitals are crowded, and trained nurses almost unprocurable. But understand from the start that you'll have to carry out my instructions to the letter. No individualism in this, Donahue." He emphasised it strongly. "I've heard that you like to do things your own way. That's all very well, as far as it goes. But this had got to be done *my* way. Remember that your son's life may depend on it."

"I'll do everything you tell me," Conal answered with humility.

And he did. He nursed Pat faithfully and with unwearied diligence: few women would have acquainted themselves more admirably. He was patient, forbearing, tireless, under the most trying provocation, for Pat was not easy to serve. It was, perhaps the measure of his achievement that he touched not so much as a single glass of liquor from the day Pat was taken ill until he was on the way to recovery.

During the first few days Pat struggled to disengage himself from a heavy cloud of illusion, only to be submerged repeatedly by a host of broken and haunting dreams which fluttered like tortured birds. Scenes and events stored away in some unfathomable fastness of his mind returned in a strangely grotesque form to present themselves to him anew. He could hardly tell if he were a part of them again, or if they were merely the transient figments of his feverish brain. . . . Hadley and Tiger . . . Doreen, Violet, he muttered things to all of them. He stammered things to Keller. . . . And then one day Conal's face resolved itself through the mist, stood firm, and Conal's own human voice asked him:

"Want anything, old man?"

He was immeasurably glad to find Conal again. . . .

But he had still to stay where he was. He had still to lie

helpless awaiting Conal's care, to rely on him to do this for him, to perform that, as if he were a new-born child. And he hated it. He hated everything Conal had to do for him, he resented his own weakness, he rebelled against Conal's devoted attention to his least and his greatest needs.

One day, with a quick increase of colour, he asked :

"Conal—did I talk a lot of rubbish when I was sick?"

"No. I don't think so."

"And that's a lie, isn't it?"

"It would perhaps be more truthful to say that I don't remember a word of what you said," Conal said firmly.

Pat let it go at that. Some time later he asked.

"What happened—about the police . . . and—and Max Keller?"

"There was an inquest. Your mother and I had to attend it." Conal replied in a matter-of-fact tone as though inquests were very usual occurrences in his life. He began to measure out Pat's medicine, and he was so closely engaged that he didn't glance in Pat's direction as he added: "We didn't say anything about the letter. They never knew about it. Poor Keller was a casualty of war—or rather what underlies war—as surely as if he'd been hit by a bullet. I established that for them without any difficulty."

"A casualty of war?" Pat repeated slowly. "How did you come to decide that?"

"Some things he told me. Some things I guessed."

"Some things you guessed?" Pat stared at the foot of the bed. With an effort he said: "You never asked me what was in—that letter."

"It is not my habit," Conal answered, "to ask questions." He paused and then went on: "I've quite a lot of faith in you, Pat. Without it, I've found, any sort of—friendship is pretty useless." And he chose his words carefully, as if he wanted Pat to know that it wasn't just because they were father and son that they were friends. "There's only one thing I'm not sure of. I thought about it often when you were ill." He stopped again, and Pat waited. "I wondered if I had neglected something—whether I should have denied you God in any of His forms. If

I have failed in my commitment, I have indeed generated a child and cast him into darkness, both with the same act. . . .”

“Oh, break it up, Conal!” Pat was embarrassed. Conal had said enough. If he went on there was no saying how far he might go. Pat didn’t mind strong language, improper language, from his contemporaries, but there were limits to what you could take from a parent. Hastily he changed the subject.

“What happened to Max’s room—his things?”

“The Crown claims the estate of anyone who dies—like that.” Conal saw it was impossible to pursue the line he had opened, so immediately he left it, and became impersonal again. “They took away all his possessions—except his manuscripts, which had your name written on them. (And, by the way, I’ve got them for you when you want them) . . . And we have a new guest in his room. A Mr. Green. He’s a printer. Has an office in Lonsdale Street. A plain, unadorned trifle, that even your mother finds soulless . . . And here’s your medicine.”

Pat drank it. A newcomer had filled Keller’s place. Things happened so fast—there was no time between one event and the next, everything overlapped and merged. Soon, he thought, I’ll forget Max. All that part of my life will fade. I’ll be having the next experience. . . .

When he was convalescent, they had a letter from Catherine Donahue (Stephen’s “gilt-edged security” as Conal called her. She was much distressed, she said, to hear of Pat’s illness, and she hoped he would spend some weeks of the summer with her and Stephen and Winifred at their sea-side home at Frankston. Pat turned down the invitation flatly.

“A holiday wouldn’t do you any harm, you know,” Conal ventured, without undue emphasis, when Pat had finished stating all his objections. “And Stephen would give you a marvellous time.”

“I don’t want a marvellous time. Because I’ve got rich relations is no reason why I should have privileges. I don’t want privileges when there are others who can’t have them. . . .”

Conal grinned.

“That sounds dangerously familiar. It reminds me of my lost youth, and the revolution I might have led, and didn’t.

But a revolution requires more than spiritual fire, you know. You've got to have reserves of strength behind the punches. You—you've got to have—er—guts and a strong left drive. . . .” They exchanged a smile over that memory.

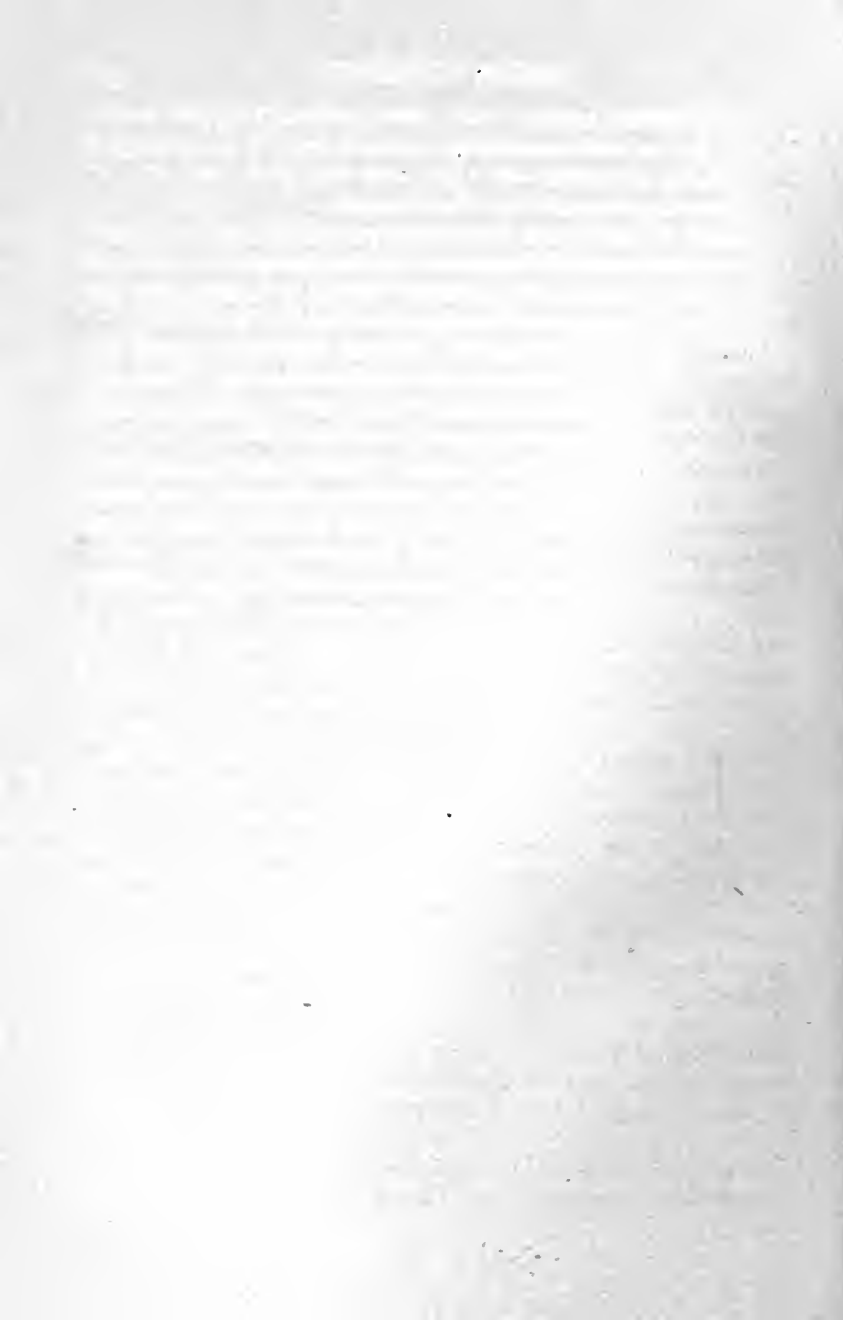
“Besides,” said Conal, “you can't put everything into watertight compartments. Sometimes it amuses the gods to intervene in the affairs of men. And you can't afford to disdain gifts the laughing gods are pleased to toss at your feet.”

But Pat refused to argue it. He wasn't going to accept the favours of representatives of the ruling class—the class that must be displaced. He wouldn't stand their patronage. And that was final, the last word.

The following year, however, when the invitation was repeated (the Stephen Donahues were certainly persistent), for some reason or other he reconsidered his objections and decided to go and stay with them.

Somewhere—there was no doubt about it—the gods smiled.

(END OF PART TWO)



PART THREE

BLUE DAYS

I

DURING that year after he left school, the year he was seventeen, Pat, having wearied of scholastic attainments, managed to find himself a job with a firm of radio dealers. His mother thought that with a Leaving Certificate he should have done better. But he easily talked her into believing that the work on which he was engaged was highly technical and important, and she was led to conclude that he had a great future ahead of him. He liked the work—but above all he liked being a man. He had money in his pocket now, money he had earned: not much, certainly, but enough to jingle, enough to give him prestige. He swaggered along the city streets, elbowed his way in and out of buses, and stared impudently at strange girls. He was riding the crest of the wave. And because he was riding it, he was inclined to throw his weight around rather too blatantly.

It was in the summer he went to stay with his relatives.

Stephen's holiday house, a mile beyond the Frankston township, was every bit as large and luxurious as his home in Toorak. Set among dark pines on a sharp rise of the cliff, it overlooked a wide vista of sea. On one side there was a grass tennis-court, and at the foot of the red gravelled path which led downwards to the beach, was a boat-house. Since his cricketing days were done, Stephen had become an ardent fisherman.

Pat's uncle and aunt, hiding their surprise at his decision to favour them with his company, welcomed him with an hospitable readiness to forget old feuds. Catherine, seeing in him something of the aspect of the son who should have been hers and Stephen's, tried with the considerable charm she commanded to dispel his distrust, his defensive aloofness. And her efforts

did not go quite unrewarded. But Stephen was not as successful. Stephen had a motive behind his invitation. And as soon as he'd manoeuvred Pat into the garden by himself he broached it.

"I hear you've got a job in some radio shop, Pat," he began, as they turned their steps down the red path towards the sea. "I can't see there's much future in it, my boy. You'll never be more than a salesman, you know. . . ."

"Oh, I'll be a lot more than that," Pat corrected him. "I know quite a bit about radio already, and in the end I hope to be something of an expert."

"Still, I think you could do better. You got your Leaving Certificate, and your mother wrote to tell me how highly they thought of you at school. Now what about the shipping business, Pat? Ever thought of it? I could fix you up with quite a nice little job with us. And it would lead to something. You'd go up in the world. You see, you've got the name."

The name . . . the name Donahue. . . . That was it. That was what Stephen was after. Not Pat so much, as Pat's name. To hell with the name! He wasn't going to hand it over to satisfy Stephen's family pride. If he ever made anything of it, it was going to be for himself, not for Stephen.

"I'm not interested in shipping," he answered—politely enough, for after all he was the man's guest.

"Yes, but you could be." Stephen looked and sounded impatient; no matter how hard he tried to be nice to Pat, Pat always seemed suspicious of his motives. "Interest's a thing which will grow if you let it. . . . Don't give me a final answer now," he added hastily, seeing his nephew was on the point of disputing his statement. "You're going to spend a fortnight with us. Think about what I've said, and we'll have another talk before you go." And, as if dismissing the matter, he began to discuss fishing.

Before them the sea lay tranquil, blue, lost in the blue sky that swept its furthest rim. It was as if they were walking down into an abyss of shimmering blue space. Pat felt an upsurge of pure pleasure. The place was lovely—unbelievably. Conal had been right about the foolishness of disdaining gods' gifts. Because he felt happy he wouldn't start a disagreement with Uncle

Stephen. His mind was irrevocably bent on planning his own life—but there was no need to rub it in just now—not to-day, at any rate, when the sea was so still and blue. A fragment of poetry came from somewhere in the stored-up recesses of his mind . . . “green days in forest and blue days at sea . . .” He didn’t know what it was; it came with a cool freshness, like a half-felt breeze, even like a suggestion of romance, of first love . . . “green days . . . blue days. . . .”

And blue days they were, which slipped by like sapphires on a silken thread. Stephen’s proposal hung in abeyance. It was there somewhere suspended between them, but they left it alone. A discussion of sober topics was hardly in order when the sun shone and the sea rippled softly to a golden shore.

Every day Pat swam with his cousin Win. Much as he disliked her he had to admit she was a game kid in the water. He had to put forward his best not to be surpassed by her—and he had always been conceited about his swimming. They dared each other to venture ever faster and farther, they both refused to take a beating. Win tried also to teach him to play tennis; but Pat showed only a minimum of keenness. He said he found it a slow, sissy game, but his real objection was his dislike of being tutored by Winifred. In the water he was her equal, and a little more—on the court she held the mastery.

Catherine watched them together, and often smiled to herself over the points they shared in common: the main one being a firm determination to hold a position early taken up, no matter how indefensible.

When the first week was over Win rudely shattered Pat’s growing contentment by announcing:

“I’ve just had a letter from my friend, Margot Jennings. She’s coming down for a few days. And she says that her brother, Fletcher, will probably be coming too, because Daddy asked him for the fishing. . . . They’re terribly nice people, Pat. Fletcher was stroke of the Grammar crew last year, and he’ll be sure to row for Trinity later on. All the girls will be ill with jealousy when they hear we’ve had Fletch Jennings to stay. As for Margot, well, she’s the loveliest thing that ever was. You’re sure to fall in love with her. Everybody does. . . .” And

she continued to dilate on the excellence of her friend and her friend's brother with, to Pat's way of thinking, absurd over-emphasis. The thought of strangers—and strangers who fulfilled the perfection of Win's description—dismayed him. He'd been having fun ; newcomers would be sure to spoil it. And such newcomers ! Fletcher was, according to Win, the real type of public-school hero—stroke of the first eight, a distinguished cricketer, handsome, debonair, the idol of Win's set. In the same way, with the indiscriminate enthusiasm of adolescence which finds equal charm in either sex, Win extolled the virtues of Fletcher's sister. Pat decided they must be a pair of stuck-up paragons, and made up his mind to detest them.

On the day the two guests were to arrive Stephen was suddenly summoned to town on business, and Catherine drove up in the car with him to see a sick relative. They did not propose to return that night, so Win, supported by a very adequate domestic staff, was left to act the role of hostess.

"Pat'll stand by, won't you, old man?" asked Stephen, before they went. "Tell Fletcher I'm sorry about the fishing, but hope to be back to-morrow. He can take the boat out himself if he likes." Following which, he got into the Buick beside his wife, and away down the drive they sped.

About an hour later a smart red sports car drove in through the gates. Pat cast eyes of envy over its slim lines which had for him a dynamic appeal, and then he got very angry. This Fletcher Jennings—who did he think he was ? Just left school, and driving a car like that ! It was positively disgusting to make such a parade of wealth—in execrable taste. He would show this scion of the upper class just how little he cared for him and his kind.

By the time Win's friends had jumped out and been vociferously greeted by their young hostess, Pat had set his mind firmly against them. The idea of social civilities between himself and representatives of an order so detested, was abhorrent to him.

But social civility was apparently expected, for no sooner had she welcomed the arrivals than Win turned to present them to Pat, who stood back on the terrace in unbending arrogance.

"This is my cousin, Pat Donahue."

Unwillingly Pat came forward. He saw a tall, slim boy and a tall, slim girl, both with copper-coloured curly hair, both possessed of an easy athletic grace. In feature they were alike too, except that while the eyes of the boy were grey, the girl's were brown.

"Win—you never told me you had a cousin." And Margot Jennings looked at him as if she were unbelieving, and sought a family likeness.

Next to Win any girl would seem attractive, and Pat was no judge of feminine charm—but there was something about Margot that instantly set her apart from any girl he'd ever seen before. He couldn't have named that difference. Half unconsciously he took in the soft, dark eyes, the pale skin faintly tinged a golden bronze, the wide, generous mouth with the row of small, even teeth. He saw those, and he heard the voice—quiet, melodious, warming to laughter. Yet none of these things played much part in his swift, intuitive impression. There was something more, something intangible, impossible to describe . . . but he fought against it, for it was not part of the plan to have his fancy captured by a girl who had no place in the world he knew, or even in the world he wanted to know.

"Of course I've a cousin."

He made a contribution: "I'm not mentioned because Win's ashamed of me."

Margot laughed. "Why?"

Win laughed too, and shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not exactly—ashamed. But he does say dreadful things. He's a Socialist. So I suppose that accounts for it."

"I've never met a Socialist before. Not a real one. . . ." And Margot surveyed Pat anew with an expression half-puzzled, half-amused.

"You'd better look out then," said Win darkly. "He's got awful theories and admires Russia—and once he used to have a gang of his own. And he argues dreadfully."

Then Fletcher spoke. Although he was like his sister, there was more laughter in his face, an easier acceptance of things. Margot, in spite of her gentleness and humour, would take up a stand with unflinching ardour should the occasion demand it—

Fletcher, who might be hard enough on himself, would let others off more lightly because it was pleasanter.

"I'll give you a fair warning, here and now, that I'm not going to get involved in any arguments," he said to Pat, his eyes creasing with the amusement his words belied. "I'm no good at them. If you want to start anything of the sort, I'm sure Win or Margot will co-operate. But I'm out. No one can start a row with me."

"You don't know enought to argue, Fletch," his sister told him. "You only know about rowing and scoring centuries—and how to dance." She added the last a trifle scathingly.

"And fish," contributed Fletcher, imperturbably.

"Even if you don't know anything about Socialism you can still argue," said Win. "I don't know one thing about it. But that doesn't stop me arguing with Pat."

"Nothing would stop you from arguing, angel," said Fletcher giving her a brotherly slap on her backside—which Win accepted with a little more than sisterly meekness. There was no doubt that she admired Fletcher to distraction, but she was only fifteen. Fletcher was eighteen, and so close to six feet that the extra quarter inch or so didn't make much difference.

They were neighbours of the Stephen Donahues in Toorak. Margot and Win went together to a neighbouring school, and although there was a couple of years between them, they saw a good deal of each other. Fletcher moved on a somewhat different plane. Clearly he hadn't come down to spend his undivided time with a kid of fifteen; a man of his years, for all his good nature could not be expected to abandon his serious pursuits and pass the hours, sunny though they might be, in idleness. No, indeed. Fletcher had come to fish. And now he discovered that his host and fellow-fisherman had gone to town. Fletcher was not annoyed—he was never annoyed—but that was not to say he wasn't put out. Win saw it, and although it hurt that he could prefer a flathead to her society, she attempted consolation.

"Daddy was awfully sorry he had to go, Fletch—but he'll be back to-morrow."

"Fletch doesn't mind," Margot intervened quickly. "We'll

go and have a swim. It's a glorious day." And Pat—ridiculously—felt elated over the prospect of displaying his powers in the water. He'd show these friends of Win's what he could do. But Win knew that Fletcher was disappointed.

"Daddy said you were to take the boat out if you liked. I'd offer to go with you, only the last time you said I talked too much and scared away the fish."

"So you did," smiled Fletcher. "And why should you come? I know you detest it. And Margot isn't keen. I'll take Pat with me—if he'll come." He turned to Pat. "Can you row?"

"Sure." Pat, who had never handled an oar in his life, replied promptly. Damn it, it looked simple enough; he wasn't going to own his inability. He was sorry he couldn't show off his swimming—but the prospect of a whole afternoon in the company of two girls was alarming. Singly he might have dealt with them, but a double opposition was more than he could let himself in for.

Then Win went into ecstasies over the car.

"It's a little lamb, Fletch, a perfect angel," she said in that exaggerated, genteel lady's voice that made Pat long to punch her. "I never did see anything so adorable. When did you get it?"

They went down to inspect and admire, and to remove the Jennings's assortment of luggage, tennis racquets and fishing gear.

"Dad gave it to me for my birthday," Fletcher answered, with affected nonchalance. "Takes a bit of managing at first, but I think I've got the hang of her now."

"You must take us all for a drive," suggested Win, and Margot said laughingly: "You just try to stop him!"

"That's as may be, darling—but she'll keep. Now I'm going fishing. And Pat's coming along."

"Look out for Pat, Fletch," Win advised warningly as the two girls turned towards the house. "I ought to know. He's my cousin. And I'd class him as distinctly dangerous."

"Oh, I'm immune even to measles," Fletcher answered easily, "and politics are less infectious."

There was hardly a ripple as the waves washed the sand; they soon got the boat launched, and sprang in. Fletcher took up the oars.

"You can have a go afterwards. I want to get my hand in."

Pat watched him narrowly without appearing to do so; ignorance was a thing to conceal, not to exhibit. Fletcher rowed with so little difficulty, though, that there really didn't seem to be much to it. In spite of his slim build his shoulders were broad, and he had good, firm muscles. . . .

"In your school crew, aren't you?" Pat asked rather patronizingly, for school was a long way behind him now.

"Yes. Or I was. I've just left."

"Didn't you get damned sick of it?"

"Not particularly." Fletcher pulled hard for a few minutes; then he said: "It was pretty good fun. Cricket. Rowing. . . ."

"You public school blokes only think of sport, don't you?" Pat said aggressively. "I wonder when you ever learn anything. But perhaps you don't," he added.

Fletcher wrinkled his forehead as he stared at him; then he laughed.

"I suppose, as a good Socialist, you've got to be prejudiced against all the things you can't have."

"I'm prejudiced against the snobbery of the public school system, certainly."

"I'm not a snob. I don't give a damn for social distinctions. I take people as I find them. As you brought up the idea that there's a difference between us I think you're the snob—not me. Only you've got aspirations downwards."

He said it without rancour, even with a slight smile on his lips, and when he saw that Pat was about to retort hotly he thrust the oars into his hands by way of forestalling him.

"Here. You row. I want to get the lines ready. And didn't I tell you I don't like quarrelling!"

"Fair go," Pat expostulated. "Who said all the disagreeable things, I'd like to know!"

"You asked for it, so I had to let you have it. . . . Now, shut

up, there's a decent chap. You'll alarm the gentle fish."

Pat had watched him carefully, so he was able to manipulate the oars pretty well—but it wasn't as easy as it had looked when Fletcher did it, and he began to have a new respect for the effortless manner in which the other had performed the feat.

"Don't go so hard at it," Fletcher advised, watching him. "You'll tire too soon if you do. Dip gently, pull firmly. . . . How old are you?"

"Eighteen next June."

"I've got seven months to crow over you. Besides years of rowing. I'll coach you a bit, if you like. You've got the shoulders of a oarsman."

From anyone else Pat would have been annoyed by these remarks as far too superior, but for some reason Fletcher didn't make him feel like that. Perhaps it was because Fletcher was so much better at it than he was.

"Have you finished with school?" Fletcher asked him.

"I should think so. I'm in the radio business."

"Like it?"

"Oh, it's all right. Just a job, you know. Doesn't run to cars or anything of that sort," he added rather vindictively.

A slight change came over Fletcher's face. "She's a little beauty, of course. But Dad can afford it. I'm lucky that way."

"What is your father?"

"A doctor. A specialist in Collins Street. Wants me to follow after him."

"Oh, Lord!" said Pat.

"Why do you say, 'Oh Lord,' in just that tone?" And Fletcher looked nettled.

"I might have said more. I've very strong views about the medical profession. But if you're one of the clan I suppose I'd better shut up."

"I can take it."

"O.K." And Pat decided to give it to him hot—and see if he could. "To my way of thinking—and I know plenty of others feel the same—doctors have no right to exist as private money-grubbers. They should be paid servants of the State, and within everybody's reach, just as medicine should be free. The

whole business as it is now is a ramp to extort money from credulous superstitious people. The poor suffer because they can't afford the stuff that might cure them. It's one of the worst injustices of a mismanaged democracy." (A good deal of this he'd got from Riverside Reg, but a reasonable percentage was his own.)

"What you need," Fletcher told him with equanimity, "is a soap-box and an unkempt following of dirty loafers. My father works damned hard—and he's not a money grubber."

"Well, he belongs to a profession that is. The very fact that a man takes up medicine marks him. It's a profession closed to all but the wealthy."

"My God!" Fletcher exclaimed. After a pause, he went on more quietly: "I can't help it. I didn't make things the way they are."

"No. But if you have the guts you can oppose them. You can help make them over into the things they might be."

Fletcher had told him that he was not the sort to argue, so now he tried to head him off.

"Are you really Mr. Donahue's nephew?" he asked.

Pat grinned.

"We may have the same blood or whatever it is relations do have. But what of it? I'm much closer to any poor bastard of a labourer than I am to Stephen Donahue."

"I see," said Fletcher. He began to cast the lines.

"You don't like my theories?" Pat suggested, feeling he'd made something of an impression.

"Not much. But I don't know you very well. Perhaps you don't quite mean it all. If I decided to take you on, I'd give you back plenty. . . . But I've come to fish." And, dismissing it, Fletcher began to instruct him in the intricacies of fishing.

There followed the long, exacting wait for a bite, which, when it came, caused Pat to forget for the time being everything else. It developed into a most successful afternoon's fishing, and in the interest and excitement of it, they found a common basis of understanding. Pat saw much in Fletcher to admire, and Fletcher found that, in spite of the theories he found so unattractive, Pat had sense and practical ability, and,

best of all, a dogged determination to achieve. . . . When the sun sank down in vivid splendour, they regarded their catch with satisfaction, and each paid silent homage to the other's contribution. Then they turned the boat in the direction of the shore, and Fletcher rowed back over a motionless sea, heavy with its burden of molten gold.

"Margot's the one to appreciate sunsets," he said. "She likes poetry and that sort of thing. And she's very musical. She's going to the Conservatorium when she leaves school."

Pat found he was interested—very interested, and he kept Fletcher on the subject of his sister for as long as he could.

Margot was just seventeen. She had brains as well as beauty. She was fond of reading and classical music. She didn't care about dancing or jazz. Most of Fletcher's friends were inclined to be in love with her. They were always offering to do things for him, he said, so they'd stand high in his regard and be given an invitation to his home. He'd seen through that long ago. It was no use him kidding himself he was the popular one. They were all after Margot. And how did Margot treat these admirers of hers? Oh, well enough. She was kind to them because she couldn't help being kind, bless her little heart. But none of them got more encouragement than the rest, except perhaps a neighbour of theirs, one Richard Clark, a musical chap. . . . Pat conceived a sudden feeling of deadly animosity for the unknown Richard Clark. . . .

They came back to a dim, silent shore. Little waves whispered round their feet as they dragged in the boat, the faintest wind stirred the ti-trees which stood gaunt and crooked to either side of the cliff path. Fletcher took out a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and offered it to Pat. Pat shook his head.

"Don't you smoke yet?" Fletcher asked, as he took one himself and lit it.

"I don't know what you mean by 'yet'. I don't smoke."

"I don't often. And never when I'm in training. But I thought you would."

"Why should I?"

"Oh, I don't know. You seem old for your age. And tough. Tougher than most of the chaps I know."

Pat found that remark decidedly complimentary. So he had made an impression.

The lights from the house showed through the pines as they mounted to the top of the path. The red light of Fletcher's cigarette gleamed in the shadows as they walked towards them.

"I'm not as awfully struck on this doctor business as you may think," Fletcher said abruptly. "Oh, it's got nothing to do with your precious Socialist twaddle. . . . It's—it's—But what's the use of telling you? You wouldn't understand." Into his light voice there had crept a slightly defensive note, and Pat recognized it. Because of it he maintained silence, and somehow that very silence encouraged Fletcher. It suggested to him that Pat was not altogether unfriendly, and so, trusting the silence, he spoke into it.

"I want to go on the land. As a matter of fact, I'm terribly keen. It's something I want very much. . . ."

"Then why don't you do it?"

"My father wants me to take up medicine. He's about as keen on that as I am on the other." And Fletcher laughed, a laugh that wasn't quite true; despite the abundance of surface gaiety he possessed, Pat saw beneath it the first glimmer of seriousness.

"Surely you can make your father see that if you're set on something else you won't make a very good doctor. Can't you manage your father?" he asked. "Mine would never stop me doing anything I wanted to." And it gave him considerable pleasure to say that; it was so true it needed no embellishment.

They came up through the darkening garden to where the small car stood on the drive before the terrace. They came to a halt beside it, and Fletcher regarded it ruefully.

"He's not the sort of father who pushes you around," he told Pat. "He's damned good to me—perhaps too good. Margot and I have never gone without anything. . . . It's just because of that I've got to do what he wants."

Pat thought Fletcher's way of arguing decidedly out of order. Because Conal had developed so strongly in him a sense of free choice, he couldn't understand why Fletcher had to follow his father's wishes rather than his own.

"I think you should do what you want," he maintained doggedly. "Have you put it to him?"

"Lord, no!" Fletcher scouted the idea. "I know what he wants well enough. I've known for eighteen years what my life was to be. You see, we're a family of doctors—my father, and his father before him, back and back. . . . And I don't hate it altogether. If I did I suppose I'd have to make a fight. I'll like it all right, I expect. But the other appeals to me a whole lot more."

As they went into the house he added:

"It's something I've kept to myself. Only Margot knows. And you. And after our series of disagreements it's a matter of surprise to me that I should have let you in on it. . . . Do Socialists keep secrets?" he asked with a return of his bantering tone.

"To the death," Pat answered. "Or at least this one does."

III

Dinner was ready for them when they went in, and the girls were waiting. Win took the head of the table in her mother's best manner.

"We thought you two had got drowned, and we were just coming to look for you," she said. "We'll never be able to get through so much fish. . . . Besides, it's not terribly polite to Margot and me—deserting us like that for the livelong afternoon." She spoke rather too loudly, because she was excited and nervous, being the youngest present and not yet accustomed to playing the role of hostess entirely unaided; there were two spots of colour on her heavy, angular face.

Pat couldn't help comparing her with Margot, who sat opposite him. She had changed into a frock of deep rose pink, which left her arms bare, and her copper curls were tied with a rose-coloured ribbon; the shaded lamps seemed to glow back into her eyes and over her pale golden skin; she was all the light and colour in the room.

"It's a wonder to me you caught anything," Win continued. "Pat's awful ideas were enough to drive any self-respecting fish away. I expect he talked and argued all the time."

"You forget—I don't argue," Fletcher said, winking at Pat.

"But a saint would argue with Pat. I don't know why I should have such a cousin." Win spoke sharply, for she had seen the wink, and it annoyed her that Fletcher and Pat should get on well together. "He's not a bit like our side of the family."

"I think he is, Win." For the first time since they had sat down, Margot spoke, and her voice sounded soft after Win's. "I think he's like your father."

Win refuted this hotly.

"He isn't. How can you say such a thing, Margot? Daddy's a very handsome man. No one could call Pat even good looking."

Pat bowed acknowledgments.

"Suits me," he said. "I'm sure I don't want to look like handsome Uncle Stephen."

Win looked triumphantly at Margot.

"There you are. What did I tell you? Isn't he every bit as rude as I said?" Then she turned to Pat. "Margot won't think much of the way you treat her compliments."

"Oh, Win. . . ." Margot was distressed. "It wasn't meant as a compliment. . . . I—I mean, I know your father's a handsome man, but I just thought Pat was a little like him . . . the eyes, you know. . . ." She gave it up hopelessly, and looked down to hide the colour in her cheeks.

Fletcher sought to interpose.

"You must come and see us when we go back to town, Pat. I'll show you my camera. It's a Leica. And I've got a gun. Dad and I go duck-shooting in the autumn. And. . . ."

But Pat cut him short.

"I don't visit Toorak houses."

Again Win was delighted, as if Pat were some sort of rare animal on show and was responding in just the right way.

"You won't be able to civilize him, Fletch. He's hopeless. And he could have been all right. Daddy offered to send him to Melbourne Grammar and make a gentleman of him, but Pat wouldn't have it. . . ."

She had gone too far. They all realized it. Her words opened up an avenue Pat was bound to follow. As a matter of duty and of conscience—and also from an overpowering necessity to establish his own personality and show how totally unimpressed he was by the display of wealth around him, he had to pour ridicule on the things she most deeply revered. Class. Social standing. They represented an order he wanted to see destroyed. From being a little proud of him, Win, conscious of her guest, became more and more mortified and alarmed by so much heresy.

“Stop it, Pat!” she commanded fiercely when she could make herself heard. “It’s awful to talk like that. What will Margot and Fletcher think?”

And Margot said swiftly with an edge of sharpness to her tone :

“I don’t suppose Pat cares in the least what we think.”

“Quite right,” he agreed, not quite meeting her gaze, which was he knew frankly sizing him up. . . .

“Let’s cut out the politics, shall we?” proposed Fletcher. “After all, we are guests in this house, and one must observe certain rudiments of good manners.” His tone was easier than Margot’s, but under it there was meaning clear enough. Pat felt very much that they’d both most ably put him in his place. He made an effort to recommence the discussion, but the other three by rising in the middle of one of his most cherished utterances put an end to his oratory.

Afterwards in the big living-room with the immense windows which set a frame about the sea, now fading into night, he actually made an overture to Fletcher, because Fletcher had been unaffectedly friendly that afternoon, and had had moreover sufficient faith in him to offer him something in the nature of a confidence.

“Win makes me wild sometimes,” he said lamely, when he was sure they could not be overheard by the other two. It was an excuse, the only one he could muster. But Fletcher accepted it—not for the poor thing it was, but because of what underlay it, and smiled.

“Relations. I know. I’ve got a few I can’t stick. They get me bristling right down the spine.”

"That's the way Win gets me."

Fletcher nodded. He was essentially a happy person who preferred friendship to enmity, who smiled, and expected to see his smile reflected on the faces of others. And he nearly always did; Pat was no exception.

"Poor Win. She hasn't all the tact in the world," he said. "Now, take Margot for comparison. She and I get on marvelously—never quarrel. She's got the right angles on everything. A girl in a thousand. And if a mere brother can say that——"

"She plays, doesn't she?" And Pat glanced towards the piano which stood by the window; Margot had her elbows resting on it as she leaned across to talk to Win on the music stool.

"Yes. She's mad on music."

And Pat said awkwardly: "I'd like to hear her."

Fletcher raised his eyebrows, and then, concealing his surprise, suggested: "Why don't you ask her yourself?"

Seeing that Pat was incapable of explaining why, Fletcher good-naturedly went over to the piano.

"Come on, old girl, do your stuff."

But Margot shook her head emphatically. "Not to-night, Fletch."

"Why not, angel?"

"I don't feel inclined."

"Nonsense. You're always inclined. I've never heard you refuse before."

"No one here," and Margot looked vaguely in the general direction of Pat, "would enjoy it."

Fletcher laughed.

"That's a crack at us, Win. Margot abhors our low taste for dance music. Never mind. We'll have a game of bridge."

Later he said in an aside to Pat:

"Sorry. Couldn't work it. I've never seen Margot so determined."

They played bridge, and not an hour had passed before Pat, Fletcher and Win were restored to excellent humour and agreement—but Margot maintained her determination to be frigid in Pat's company.

IV

The next day the wind shifted to a different quarter and the waves came in with more purpose. But it was still fair weather—blue weather, and the four of them went swimming before breakfast. Thus Pat was afforded an opportunity to show off his powers, an opportunity of which he availed himself with abominable vanity. Even if Margot didn't like him, she could not help but observe the variety of his strokes, the cleanness of his diving. But Margot seemed unconscious of the exhibition. His self-esteem stung, he was driven to desperate exertions, which availed him nothing, for soon she left the water, and lay down on the sand to sun-bathe, deliberately turning her back on him. So he had to show off for Fletcher and Win instead. And that was not nearly so exhilarating.

Later in the morning, Fletcher, whose mind did not wander far from the serious purpose of his visit—namely, fishing—suggested that he and Pat should take out the boat again, which they proceeded to do, returning with a catch even more substantial than that of the previous day. They exhibited it proudly, seeking the girl's admiration, but Pat knew he could take small credit for it, seeing it had been mainly Fletcher's work—and deft work too, forcing his respect. Achievement having thus inspired him, it was no wonder Fletcher wanted to put forth again after lunch. But politeness prevailed over inclination, he agreed to stay and play tennis with Win and Margot. Pat marvelled over the curse of good manners, which prevented a fellow doing what he wanted to do. For his part, he couldn't be induced to take part in a sport in which he couldn't distinguish himself. He wasn't going to appear before Margot as a novice, so he declared it absolutely imperative that he should write a letter to his mother—a duty which had only just occurred to him.

The letter completed, he wandered into the front sitting-room, and seeing the piano open, sat down before it, and idly began to play. The fine tone of the instrument—it was Catherine's—gave him unexpected pleasure, and he went on for some time, playing compositions of Keller's, many of which he now had by heart, and which he felt in some subtle way were almost his own.

It was strange, for Keller had put into so much of his music his love for his beautiful, lost country. But Pat, as he gazed through the window at the expanse of rolling sea, golden and blue behind the dark pines, felt, in a sudden upsurge of perception, that he too had a beautiful land to interpret, to realise . . . and not a lost land like Keller's, a land he had hardly yet found, which held for him all the mystery, the promise of the unknown. . . .

His mind drifted away from Keller. There was no doubt that Keller had woken something in him—Keller's tenderness had called to his loneliness: he had needed it, and denied it, because it was not here he might assuage it, not with Keller. Every human being, he began to perceive, was lonely—each looked for, each cried out for understanding, for completion of himself in another; it was a terrible, unsatisfied yearning of flesh and spirit.

Not for the first time, but with a new intensity, he felt it. It was not possible to make your journey through life alone, no matter how keenly you desired to do so. There was always this ill-defined wish to warm your hands at the grateful warmth of another's fire. There was this call, this summoning of the most deeply buried emotions, which he fought to disown, because he valued his independence beyond price. . . .

The sea was darkening. Out on the far horizon a white sail glimmered and was lost in the long, golden train of the departing sun; a light wind passed among the pines . . . green days . . . blue days, he thought. . . . And suddenly he remembered more :

“ I will make a palace fit for you and me,
Of green days in forests and blue days at sea. . . . ”

I will make a palace. . . . But who will live out the blue days with me in my palace. . . . ?

Close to him a voice broke across his music and his reverie.

“ I didn't know you could play.”

He looked up—and it was Margot. She had come silently, unexpectedly from the tennis-court, her racquet in her hand, her hair tied back with a canary-coloured silk scarf. She was watching him with a puzzled expression in her brown eyes—as

if she were making a readjustment. How long she had been there he did not know.

He got up quickly.

"I can't play. Not like you can."

"But you haven't heard me."

"No. But I will." With a gesture he invited her to the music stool, but she shook her head.

"I like listening. And especially to what you were playing just then. It was beautiful. And you played it beautifully."

(His swimming, of which he was inordinately proud, she had disdained, but his playing, of which he was a little ashamed, she praised with warmth and enthusiasm. Perhaps his humility in this field appealed to her more than his vanity in the other.)

"What were you playing?" she asked. "I heard you down on the court. I couldn't think who it was. Win said it must be her mother come back. But Mrs. Donahue always plays Grieg or Strauss. . . . I've never heard what you were playing before."

"It's unpublished stuff. A friend of mine wrote it——"

"It's lovely, Pat. Lovely, and so sad. Please play it for me."

She spoke with emphasis and suppressed ardour, leaning towards him over the wide polished surface of the piano, her eyes bright, with expectancy. . . . But he was not yet hers to command.

"You wouldn't play for me last night," he reminded her.

The hot red blood dyed her cheeks.

"I didn't know you wanted me to."

He was still hard enough to accuse her.

"Yes, you did. You looked at me when you said no one would enjoy it if you played. You meant it for me."

"But how was I to know you would enjoy it? You seemed so . . . well, I didn't like you. That's why. I'm ridiculously sensitive about an audience. If I feel people are unfriendly, I just can't play well."

Unkindly Pat stared at her stained cheeks. He was not quite conscious that he was doing so, but he certainly relished the fact that he had this girl, who had almost ignored him for twenty-

four hours, embarrassed by his questioning, almost—as it were—at his mercy. He felt his power, and he used it.

“You didn’t like me? Why?”

“Why . . . because your ideas are so—so destructive.”

He answered indignantly:

“They’re not. They’re constructive. What I’d destroy I’d rebuild . . . on different lines, of course.”

“Oh, I know,” she said hastily. “I do know there’s an awful lot to be done. You may think, because I’ve lived a sheltered sort of life, that I don’t know anything about suffering and poverty. But I do.” She passed on a quickly-drawn breath. “I haven’t seen it, of course, but I’ve read books. Books about the war and Europe. They hurt me, but I had to read them. I felt somehow I owed it to my music to feel as intensely as I could. I wouldn’t ever want to evade . . . real experience, real knowledge. I want to put it into my music. You see, I take my music rather seriously.” She broke off with a little laugh as if to lighten the load of her earnestness. “But after all the fighting and—and fear we’ve passed through, it doesn’t seem the time to start it all over again with bitter class wars . . . at least, not here, not in Australia.”

“There’ll always be a battle to fight so long as there’s a privileged class,” Pat maintained firmly.

“There you go again!” But Margot smiled as if she’d got over her annoyance of the previous night. “But let’s keep off it, shall we? There are lots of interesting things we can find to agree about. . . . This friend of yours, for instance. . . . Does he compose much?”

“He did. But he’s dead now.” He looked at her defiantly, for although she had said she wasn’t afraid of real knowledge, real pain, he felt she must shrink from some of the things he’d seen, and known, and felt. He saw the smile fade from her lips as he said baldly, driving it home: “He killed himself.”

Across Margot’s expressive face there passed a look of sadness, and then, as their eyes met, he saw into the depths of sympathy. And before it his own eyes fell, because he was suddenly afraid of what Margot’s sympathy might do to him.

“I’m sorry, Pat. But you must be glad to be able to play

his music. Is it just memory, or have you got what he wrote?"

"He gave me all his manuscripts."

"Then you must be proud . . . proud to be trustee with something so beautiful. Please go on playing it."

So without another word he sat down and played her everything of Keller's he could remember. When he had finished she thanked him gravely.

"Some day you must give that music to the world, Pat. Only you can play it, because only you know how he wanted it to be. I suppose that was why he left it to you."

Was that true? Had Keller really taught him to play because he knew he was going to die, and he wanted to feel there would be someone to keep his music alive? Had he planned that before ever he spoke to Pat, or had it gradually grown in him that Pat might be used for this purpose? Was that the meaning of Keller's last message to him, the message he'd been forced to destroy. . . . If you're in it, I'm in it. . . . But did Pat want this obligation, this responsibility towards the dead? It seemed that Margot perceived something of it, but then a girl might be expected to imagine all kinds of romantic nonsense. . . . But then again, was it romantic nonsense?

"I'll never do much with it." He got up. "And now it's your turn."

She had moved away towards the window, and stood looking out.

"Fletch and Win have gone down to the beach with their towels. Shall we join them?" And then, when he didn't answer: "I owe you an apology, Pat."

"What on earth for?"

"For what I thought of you." She came back to his side.

Pat grinned.

"As I don't know what you did think, I hardly need an apology. Besides, whatever opinion you did happen to have of me, you've apparently changed it. . . . Is it because I like music?"

"Partly." She struck a treble note two or three times. "I'll play you something if you really want me to."

"Thanks . . . Margot."

For the first time her name passed his lips, and in the space

of a long breath he savoured it, and the thought came to him that it was the only feminine name he'd heard that really pleased him. There was nothing sentimental about it, but it had the very essence of romance, like the fragrance of some exotic flower . . . it was of the stuff of his cloud-visions. . . .

Unconscious of his thoughts, she played on serenely. . . . Brahms, Debussy. . . . They grew and dissolved again under her slim, pale fingers.

v

The following day was Sunday, and Stephen and Catherine returned from their expedition to town ; so Fletcher had company for his fishing activities. Pat was to have gone out with them, but at the last minute he relinquished his place to Win. It would scarcely be a hardship to stay ashore with Margot. In fact it seemed that fate had gallantly played into his hands.

They watched the others put out from the shore, then Margot, who was wearing her white bathing suit, threw herself down on the sand, extending her long, faintly bronzed limbs to the sun.

"I'm going to get brown even if it hurts," she said. "I can't go home pallid and wan. People would think I hadn't been out of town."

Pat, who was also in his togs, lay down beside her. Under them the sand was soft and warm ; they could hear the slap of the waves ; and at first quite near, then fading across the water, Win's high-pitched voice and the rhythmic strokes of Fletcher's oars. Above their head a gull cried out mournfully, and later was silent. They lay still, soaking in sunlight, and for a long time neither spoke. Then Margot asked :

"Do you really believe in all those theories ?"

"What theories ?"

"Oh, about the working class being exploited, the word is, isn't it ? And the wealthy raking in profits—and—and the necessity for a class war and all that ?"

"Certainly I believe in it."

"And you're going to fight for it—put the people I belong to down, and give the power to the working class?"

"That's wrong, Margot," he answered, patiently explaining to this novice. "Power goes to the State—in trust for the people. . . ."

"The State!" Margot rapped it out bitingly. "A heartless machine, turning out stock patterns——"

"You said yesterday you knew something about suffering and poverty. I'm only trying to find a way to fix that."

"But is Socialism enough? It can't be the answer to everything. I don't know much about it, but it seems to me there's got to be more than that. . . ." She broke off. "You're probably laughing at me. I expect you know a lot more about it all than I do."

The deference of one who excelled him in so much was balm to him; in return he could not help but offer her concessions.

"My father says Socialism isn't enough." And he recalled the rock of Conal's reason on which his finest theories had often nearly foundered. Conal didn't want to destroy his ideals—far from it—but he did not want him to be carried away by resounding phrases. Conal distrusted what was laid down as gospel simply because in time its very repetition was likely to render it meaningless. And Margot had made Pat remember this in Conal.

"Your father writes, doesn't he?" Margot asked with interest, thinking of something Win had recently told her.

Pat grunted assent.

"You don't talk about him," she went on. "He must be awfully clever. Are you and he good friends?"

"I suppose so." Seriously he considered it. "We could be—and then, suddenly, we aren't. It's the different generations. That's something you can't get over. They've done more—felt more. You can't reach them. And they can't quite get down to you. There are things they've forgotten about."

"I know. I've felt it too."

They both stared out to sea, contemplating the difficulties of being understood by an older generation—and the sudden ease with which they understood each other. Then Margot said:

"It's rotten of me to admit it, though. My parents have given me everything. I'm most unpleasantly spoilt."

It was on the tip of his tongue to say—what one obviously should say: Spoilt, perhaps, but not unpleasantly. Some blokes could have got away with it. He couldn't.

After a slight pause she asked:

"Will you come and see us at home?"

"What's the use? I told you I don't visit Toorak houses." He said it very arrogantly, but Margot apparently decided to persist.

"But why? Are you afraid of being converted to our way of thinking? Or is it that we're just not worth wasting time with?"

"Oh, lots of reasons. One is that I haven't any party manners."

"We don't insist on party manners." Margot sat up and clasped her hands about her knees. "I'm sure I don't want always to meet the same sort of people." She looked at him gravely as she spoke.

"So I'm a bit of a novelty, eh? Well, novelties have a habit of wearing thin."

She flushed angrily.

"You have a perfect gift for saying horrible things, Pat. . . ." And he knew why she was hurt with him: it was because he had rebuffed her little gesture, made in kindness and utter simplicity. "Sometimes," she added. "I could hate you for the things you say."

"Only sometimes?" he grinned—her anger, her change of colour went to his head rather. "As long as you only hate me sometimes. . . ." It wasn't so hard after all to say these things: to experiment with verbal give and take, to imply but yet evade sincerity, interest. . . . It was as if he were beginning to learn a game more charming than he'd suspected, a game which called for lightness, finesse, and which yet had under-currents of concealed purpose. . . .

He lay on one elbow, and watched the sand pass idly between his fingers. After a pause Margot spoke, and he could tell by her voice that her momentary spasm of anger was gone.

"You make life hard for yourself, don't you, Pat? Do you

always keep up your aggressive manner, your . . . your heated championship of the working class ? ”

He didn't answer, but rolled onto his back, throwing a bare arm across his eyes to protect them from the sun. Of course he didn't spend all his days flagrantly asserting himself; the protracted effort would have been too exhausting. But why he had found it necessary to do so ever since Margot's arrival would have been difficult to explain. Especially as he wasn't sure himself of the explanation. Conal had once told him it was poor and silly to try to impress people, and on another occasion he had reprimanded him for playing to the gallery. Well, if Conal could have seen his behaviour over the last few days he would most fervently have condemned it. Because Pat had been trying to impress . . . trying to impress Margot . . . and he'd been playing to the gallery as hard as he knew. . . . Perhaps, though, Conal might have understood better than he did why this desire had so strongly grown in him: this desire to stamp his personality—whether pleasantly or unpleasantly, he didn't much care—on this particular girl, to claim her consciousness and her remembrance of him.

When he didn't answer her question, she waited, and then she said quite softly:

“I don't think you're like that . . . at least not all the time. . . .”

“Now, Margot—” He sat up at that, and for once he smiled agreeably. “I've given you no reason to think well of me, have I?”

The glance she gave him seemed to glow and to sparkle. She was beginning to find him human; he saw and felt it in a new communion of thought and intimacy.

“You don't give yourself a chance” she said.

The sun glinted in her hair and flushed her skin; she seemed somehow a part of the elements, the sky, the sea, the golden sand. All light and colour came home to her.

The blood flowed fast through his veins. A sense of power, fierce and pitiless, surged to his brain. If he chose he could make this girl feel his strength. She might laugh and tease him—but, in the final test, the game was his. That was the

secret of man's ascendancy. That was what men boasted to one another about. And he felt almost a man.

"Pat, you're frowning like a thunderstorm! What are you thinking of?"

Her frank, candid eyes made him ashamed. He supposed that girls like Margot were completely innocent—indeed, he rather hoped they were. Because if she could know what had been in his mind. . . .

"You wouldn't like it."

"Try me."

He shook his head.

"Come on. We'll swim. There's been enough talking."

"What energy!" She lay on her elbow and watched him get up. "But we're such a fine figure in the water, aren't we?" she teased. "No wonder we want to show off!"

He caught her hands to pull her up—but his clasp was ungentle, and Margot cried out:

"Let go, you ruffian!" There were deep red marks across her hands; she showed them to him, half laughing, half in pain. "You hurt me, Pat."

He looked at the slim, narrow hands—he hadn't known they would mark so easily. Yet for some reason he didn't quite comprehend he'd wanted to mark them . . . he'd wanted to make her aware of the strength he held in leash. It was a beastly, rotten instinct. He knew that. But once he had her hands in his grip and felt their softness, their lack of resistance, he had thought of them simply as a means to try out his power. Now, when he looked at them, red from his fingers, he saw them, with contrition as Margot's. . . .

Their eyes met. He said nothing.

"You don't know how strong you are." Margot rose, and dismissed it.

The day passed happily away to its close. In the glow of a radiant sunset, they mounted the cliff. Far out in the path of the setting sun, the fishing boat had her nose pointed homeward.

Pat was turning over in his mind certain words—words he wanted very much to say. (He was yet so inexperienced that he thought the only lead up to the matter in question was verbal.)

The words had been with him all the afternoon—while they were swimming and laughing together, at the back of everything else he had said, over and over, soundlessly : Can I kiss you, Margot ?

Was he going to be game to say them ? He was shy and savage with unexpressed longing. This thing, so new and strange, upset all his careful calculations. The sight of a girl's mouth, the thought of touching a girl's mouth with his own, had altered the very aspect of his life.

"Can I kiss you, Margot ?"

Well, there it was at last. He'd said it—said it without tenderness, as if he were inviting her to single combat—and now he must wait, in this surging thickness of spent thought, for her answer.

If Margot were taken aback she didn't show it. Like the rest of her sex, as Pat was to discover, she too had her power—an entirely different sort of power from his, that didn't depend on physical superiority, but which was none the less strong because of that.

"Certainly you may kiss me, Pat—when the occasion demands it."

She threw it to him like a gage, for him to pick up or leave as he chose, and then, swiftly, she was ahead of him on the rough track and her feet gained speed. For a fleeting moment she glanced back at him, her finely curved lips smiling, her eyes warm and soft as the shadows beneath the pines, her expression animated, vivacious—the face of romance as he would like to live it. Then she was gone, running lightfooted towards the house.

He didn't pursue her. He felt that such a procedure, with possible amused witnesses, would have made him look ridiculous. The last thing on earth he wanted was to look ridiculous, and the mere thought that Margot might tell Win he'd asked her for a kiss made him feel hot even there in the cool, shadowed darkness. Would Margot do it ? How did he know the sort of thing girls discussed together ? She might tell Win, she might tell Fletcher too. . . . Oh, never, never would he get involved with girls again. He'd always said he wouldn't, and now. . . .

Across the lawn there floated music, ethereal, faint as if it

came from another planet . . . *Clair de Lune*. . . . Margot was playing Debussy's *Clair de Lune* . . . He stood still among the trees and listened. It was sheer witchcraft, sheer magic. Listening there he believed in her. He believed in her gentleness, her kindness, her ability to keep faith. . . . If he ever fell in love (which of course, was extremely unlikely) it would be with someone very like Margot.

In a few days they would part. He would probably never see her again. There was no reason why their paths should cross. They inhabited different worlds. But he would be glad if sometimes she recalled one Pat Donahue, as he most certainly must recall one Margot Jennings whenever the summer sea was calm and the summer days were blue.

VI

The next night—Pat's last—Win precipitated a crisis.

Everyone was there, sitting rather aimlessly in the front room. Over the sea stars glimmered faintly; the moon had not yet risen, and near the horizon there were clouds. It looked like a break in the good weather.

Stephen produced a bottle of sherry, gave a glass to his wife, and then poured one for Fletcher. The girls being, as he considered, still too young for such indulgences, he looked at Pat.

"How about you?"

"No, thanks."

There it might have ended, had not Win tactlessly interposed. She could never resist a thrust at Pat.

"D'you mean to say you don't drink? That's funny, when your father's so keen on it."

A stone dropped in their midst would hardly have disturbed the general serenity more. Margot looked as if she must fly at Win's throat, Fletcher stared uncomfortably at the glass he held, while Catherine, much upset, exclaimed:

"That's horrid of you, Win."

Almost, it seemed, without their volition, the eyes of all of

them sought Pat, who, seeing himself as the centre, attacked with ruthless force—but this time he attacked himself.

“What’s it matter? It’s no good hiding it. People find out sooner or later . . . about my father and mother.” He looked directly at Margot. “You didn’t know, did you? That my mother keeps a second-rate boarding-house, and my father, who never did a useful stroke of work in his life, is an incurable drunkard.”

He used the last word with vindictive candour. No sense of shame or loyalty restrained him. Margot might as well know . . . know the worst—and he made it the worst. And after he’d said it the sordidness of it descended on him with a force he’d never known before. Conal drunk. Conal hiding his bottles in his play-box. His mother’s untidy kitchen, where she spent so much of her dreary, work-ridden life. Mr. Traynor, and his dirty morals. He hadn’t realized quite how depressing it was, how he loathed it, how much he’d welcome a chance to get away from it. For a moment he fiercely desired the good things these people had—beautiful, orderly homes, comfort, security. He was bitterly envious of them.

This, too, was why he’d seen Margot as different from all the girls he’d ever known. She was well-bred, gracious, serene . . . she had her place in the world . . . she was the trained finished product of the ruling caste.

He’d been a fool. He’d only fallen for her because she was unlike anything he knew. She was one of the privileged. She enjoyed the advantages of a wealthy society—the advantages he and his kind must fight for. . . .

“Don’t say any more now, Pat,” Stephen advised, setting aside the ill-fated sherry bottle, as if he regretted his part in the affair. “It’s not going to do anyone any good. Win shouldn’t have said what she did. But you’re only making it worse.”

“Win must apologize,” Catherine spoke quietly, but with authority. “It was unforgivable, dear. Apart from anything else, Pat’s a guest in our house. We’ve failed in our hospitality if we hurt the feelings of any guest of ours. . . .”

“I won’t apologize!” Win answered stormily. “I don’t like Pat enough to put myself in the wrong.”

"Then you'll have to go to your room."

"Oh, all right." She went out angrily, banging the door after her.

The strained atmosphere she left behind her gradually relaxed as a result of Catherine's and Margot's valiant efforts: each vied with the other in trying to build up again Pat's self-confidence, but so delicately was it done that he hardly knew what they were at. He only thought how nice they were.

VII

He had not been long in his room that night when there was a knock at the door, and Fletcher entered.

For a while they talked about various things—fishing, swimming, football, nothing controversial—and they got on very well.

Half an hour had sped pleasantly before Fletcher, having established amicable relations, came to the real purpose of his visit.

"I wouldn't be surprised if what you said about some chaps having more of this world's goods than others is true." He hesitated, and then: "I'd be a fool if I didn't know I'd had things made damned easy for me."

And Pat saw in Margot's brother the same sort of fineness she possessed—equality that made them perceive and be grateful for, blessings so liberally bestowed. And where Win had refused (as Pat himself would most certainly have done) to put herself in the wrong, Fletcher did it without any trouble, as if it were necessary to his piece of mind. Pat marvelled at this. It disconcerted him. And when he was disconcerted, it was usually his method to counter-attack—which he did now in a way that afterwards made him feel sorry.

"You're not by any chance," he asked, "offering me sympathy?"

Fletcher reddened. "Certainly not."

"Because if that's your idea, you can save your breath. I wouldn't change places with you. If you offered me what you've got on a silver platter, I wouldn't touch it."

"I didn't suppose you would."

"Righto, then. But what's the reason for this visit?"

"Must there be a reason for everything? I only thought—Margot thought——"

"Oh, Margot put you up to it, did she?"

Fletcher started to get angry.

"What's all the fuss about? I'd hate to be as suspicious of people's motives as you are. It was only a suggestion of Margot's that I should come up and have a yarn with you, seeing that you're going home to-morrow. Not that I hadn't thought of it before she said anything—I had. I wanted to make you promise to come and see us . . . and Margot wants you to come. . . ."

Margot wants you. . . . Do you, Margot, really? Or is it just your damned pity, because of what Win said?"

"I don't think I'll come," he answered deliberately.

"Not if Margot wants you to?"

"Why should I come for Margot?" And Pat met the other's gaze fair and square, diabolically, and without even a change of colour.

"Why? Well, because I thought you seemed rather . . . well, you know. . . ." Embarrassed, Fletcher broke off.

"You're used to seeing blokes fall for your sister, is that it?" Pat's voice rose a little. "Well, get this, Fletcher. Margot's not my sort. She's outside my . . . my class. I'm not likely to ever think twice about her."

Fletcher asked quickly:

"You've got yourself as well ordered as that?"

"That's me," Pat responded brightly—and he hoped sincerely that it was.

"I never met a chap with such a set programme . . . such a—five-year plan. . . ." Fletcher gave it up. "I'd warn you if you weren't so damned sure of yourself."

"Warn me of what?"

"Of human nature, I suppose. Hang it all, we're only alive once. . . ."

"Have you got a girl?" Pat asked him.

"Not exactly . . . well, sort of. A neighbour of ours. Jane Thornton. A blonde. I can't help being a bit soft when it

comes to a blonde. And why not?" Fletcher flung at him defiantly. "I'm not going to get hot and bothered about the state of the world. I like dancing . . . and what goes with it. . . . And you can have your bloody revolution. Besides, I'm not a perfect fool. You can't hand me the line that you don't like girls. I've seen the way you look at Margot. . . ."

Fletcher had lost his temper, and now his last words made Pat lose his. He hadn't for one minute supposed that he had not got his emotions under control. The idea that he'd given himself away . . . he, the strong, the tough. . . . He was simply furious.

"You've been imagining things. Margot doesn't mean a thing to me." He said it, and he felt like kicking both himself and Fletcher, who had forced the lie out of him. To deny liking Margot was to deny that there was a sun in the heavens. He was even surprised that Fletcher swallowed it.

Fletcher stared at him, and Pat saw his face slowly harden. Fletcher had made him handsome overtures of friendship. He had taken Pat behind the scenes, and told him some rather private things. And in return Pat had given him nothing.

"Good night," said Fletcher curtly, and went out.

For a minute Pat felt like going after him. But, damn it, why should he? He didn't owe Fletcher, or anyone else, a thing. What he did was his own affair, and what he thought, and most of all, what he felt. He wasn't going to get involved with the privileged class. When this holiday was over he'd have nothing more to do with any of them. He'd been a fool to let himself in for it—but there was no great harm done. His heart wasn't going to run away with his head. He knew what he was doing. . . . She'll kiss me when the occasion demands it, will she? He snorted. As if I'll stand for terms, conditions. It's just slavery. The capitalists all over.

VIII

It became clear that Stephen wasn't going to let him off a final word. After breakfast he beckoned Pat onto the terrace.

"We were going to have a talk before you went. . . . Have you thought about what I said to you, Pat, concerning the shipping business?"

Why doesn't he let me alone? Pat thought. I said no to him once, and I'm the sort that stands by no to the last gasp.

"I want to make my own way, Uncle Stephen."

"But surely you'll accept a leg up? Why, everyone does. Besides you've got your mother to think of. You can't like seeing her work so hard." (Carefully he avoided any mention of Conal.)

The unpleasant reality of his words irritated Pat. He knew very well that being a man would entail responsibility: a form of bondage he wasn't yet ready to accept.

"We can manage," he replied briefly, and then: "Besides it's our affair." His tone was definite, inviting no argument.

There was something curiously mature about him, Stephen thought, and annoyance consumed him. Pat was refusing a chance to make something of himself, a real chance for which any other boy in the world would give a good deal. He supposed it was his brother's work—Conal's impracticable nonsense which had got him nowhere, from which only Julie's sound business sense had saved him. Well, he'd be damned if ever he held out his hand to Conal's son again. . . .

Catherine helped Pat to pack his suitcase. She also tried to persuade him to accept what Stephen offered, but she went to work in a manner more subtle than her husband's, for she was genuinely fond of Pat.

"You're not the only one to admire independence," she said as she folded one of his shirts. "I admire it too. I've always admired it. And I admire you, Pat. Your wish to stand alone, you. . . . your integrity, I think the word is." She smiled. "But sometimes when people want to give you things, it isn't a sign of weakness to accept them. . . . Tell me something, will you, Pat? Is there anything you've set your heart on doing—anything, I mean, where money can help?"

And he answered her as he'd answered Stephen: "I want

to do everything for myself, Aunt Catherine." But his voice was different from the one he'd used to his uncle: it was oddly gentle, for in spite of everything he had no doubts about Catherine Donahue. She might represent a state of things he detested and would overthrow if he could—but she was worthy of something better. He even felt, for an instant, that he would like to talk to her about Margot. . . . What an idea! He soon got hold of himself again.

And coming downstairs, his case in his hand, he found Margot waiting for him in the hall. Through the open door behind her he saw the sea, white-crested but still blue, surging triumphantly towards the unseen beach below the garden.

"There's something I want to say before you go, Pat." He set down his case, and stood there before her, wordless. "I'm sorry Win spoke the way she did about your father. I can never like her so much again." And then with the swift little burst of sincerity that made her Margot: "Your father's a poet. That's all I want to know about him. Artists are different from other people. Their contribution . . . the—the debt we owe them is so great that we just haven't got the right to judge them. We can't impose our little standards on them. Because art is above everything. *I do believe that.*" Nervously she was clasp- ing and unclasp- ing her hands—the hands he'd bruised, which still bore the marks of his rough fingers. It was almost as if he'd committed desecration of some holy thing (he, who knew no holy things), but she had no hard feelings; indeed she seemed to have forgotten about it, so intent was she on the thought she was trying to convey, a thought which apparently affected her very deeply.

Pat saw he'd have to apply matter-of-fact sense to meet this passionate intensity of hers . . . which suggested a hidden nature more emotional, more finely imbued with sensibility than he had at first supposed.

"That's all right," he told her bracingly. "I didn't mind what Win said. I can't help what my father does. It's got nothing to do with me—as long as I don't—" He paused; she looked up.

"You refused the sherry. Is that why?"

He nodded. She was getting into him all right, into his heart. To get her out again was going to be hard as hell.

Again he noticed the trembling of her sensitive hands. She's sorry for me, or upset about something. What can I say to put her at ease? I've no small talk, no bright conversation. Fletcher could do it. I can't.

"It seems to me you've got to square things with yourself in this world," he said.

"Moral questions? Right and wrong?"

He dismissed them impatiently. How people did try to attach names to the inexpressible. "Your right and wrong mightn't be mine. It's only there are some things you've got to do—to keep straight with yourself." And he knew as he spoke that he'd worked out a creed—a creed of his own that had come to him all at once, fresh, untouched by any man's doctrine. And at the very moment of its birth he had confided it to Margot. There would always be this between them.

"Yes, but there's more to it than that, Pat. How do you *know* what will keep you—straight with yourself?"

"All right. You're bringing it down to religion." And he felt really disappointed in her.

Margot was startled, even a little shocked. "Not *down*, Pat. Up. Up to religion. . . . That's what we're talking about, isn't it?"

"No, I should think not. Me to talk of religion! Why, I've never been baptized. I've never been inside a church. I'm the deepest-dyed atheist you've ever struck."

He expected her to be horrified, but she was merely thoughtful. After a long pause, she said gently:

"That's not your fault."

As she was now bent on championing him where before she had been censorious, he divined an impulse in her to attach blame to his parent rather than to him. So, rather quickly he answered:

"Yes, it is. I've my own freedom of choice."

She seemed to want to pursue that line, but he dismissed it by saying:

"I suppose I'd better be going."

"All right." But he saw she was holding back on something. They both hesitated, awkwardly. Then she said:

"You remember there was something you asked me, Pat . . . something you . . . wanted. . . ."

He remembered.

"Well . . ." The colour suffused her cheeks. She faltered below her breath: "You can now . . . if you still want to. . . ."

If you still want to. . . . He still wanted to kiss Margot; probably he'd always want to. He took a quick step towards her, then stopped, arrested by a thought. She was only offering him this because she was sorry for him. And she was sorry for him because of Conal, because of the sort of life his was, so different from hers. Well, it was his life, and he wanted no other. If she were imagining concealed sorrow, brave acceptance, romantic despair she had it all wrong. He could make no claim to any of those. Least of all did he want her pity.

"You made your condition," he said firmly, his instinctive movement arrested. "When the occasion demands it." He picked up his case. "I daresay I won't be seeing you again—for a while." He started to move out in the direction of the sun-drenched garden, and the sound of the sea. Margot watched him. Without looking at her, he could yet imagine her standing where he had left her. . . . You've made your condition, Margot, and I'm quite ready to abide by it. We'd never get along together anyway. You belong to the class mine has got to displace. . . .

Class . . . class. . . . God damn it—it wasn't a question of class. It was a question of Margot's lips spontaneously offered—and he'd refused them. What did it matter if it was only pity she had for him? Any terms would do. He'd nearly been a fool.

Swiftly he went back.

"Oh, Margot——" Inexpertly he caught hold of her and sought her mouth—hard, a rough salutation, but she made no protest. Again he experienced her softness, a softness which seemed to dissolve beneath his force, to melt beneath his ardour. . . .

First love. First kiss. A thousand tremendous possibilities. A world to conquer. Years of virile, purposeful life. The future splendid with expectation. Beauty. Friends, lost and to have. All these were of the kiss that drew him into manhood.

(END OF PART THREE)



PART FOUR

HORIZONS

I

PAT had not been at home long before his parents sensed a slight change in him. It soon became clear to them what had happened. Pat was attracted by a girl. They knew better than to ask direct questions. But by devious means they arrived at the truth. Who had joined the Stephen Donahues at Frankston? Fletcher Jennings. Why, that must be Bob Jennings' son. (Conal, as well as Stephen, had been at school with Fletcher's father.) Surely, though, Conal remembered hearing that old Bob had had more than one child. He believed there had been a daughter too. Was there a daughter? There was. . . . Unwittingly Pat gave himself away all along the line.

Julie was inclined to wax enthusiastic over this highly satisfactory choice, in a matter where she had feared Pat would not show the necessary discrimination. But Conal advised caution.

"He's too young for it to mean anything. Calf love is the most transitory of mental growing pains."

But Julie was not easily discouraged.

"Pat's nearly eighteen and he seems older because he knows his own mind. These boy and girl romances often lead to something. If Dr. Jennings took a real interest in Pat, he might——"

"He won't be allowed to," Conal interrupted. "You ought to know that by now. Pat has consistently refused everything Stephen's offered him—so he's not likely to take things from a stranger. And I wouldn't want him to," he added, half to himself.

"Well, you should," Julie retorted. "I never saw a man less ambitious for his son. Pat's got the right instincts. Otherwise he would have taken up with some awful girl—like that

Violet Watson who's always making eyes at him. He's chosen a nice girl and we ought to be thankful for it."

"We are. But don't build on it, Julie. Bob Jennings will see to it that his little girl makes a good match. There's money in the family—plenty of it, and they'll want it doubled. That's the way of the world, my dear."

But Julie would not see her bright dream fade. "Girls have married for love," she protested. "It's not true to say they haven't."

Conal smiled.

"You've been to the pictures . . . where the incredible happens. That's why I don't go near them. Let Pat blow his pretty bubbles—and not be too disappointed when they burst."

"Oh, you! You can't enjoy a romantic situation!" Julie was exasperated. "No wonder you never made a real success of writing. People don't like sour stuff like yours."

"Of course they don't," he agreed with equanimity. "Nobody likes the truth. But it's all I trade in."

II

Although he thought of Margot quite a lot—more than he wanted to—Pat had supposed that his contact with the family was broken. And so, indeed, it would have been (for he was determined not to be the one to renew it) had not Fletcher presented himself at Eastridge one Sunday. Pat didn't know whether to be pleased or sorry. Certainly if he wanted an opening, a chance to continue this thing he'd started, Fletcher was in the position to lead him back. But did he want it? Besides Eastridge on a Sunday with all the lodgers at home was a positive nightmare. It was impossible to talk to Fletcher here.

Seeing his dilemma Fletcher indicated his car at the gate.

"Come for a spin," he suggested.

As they walked down the path together, he remarked: "I couldn't quite remember whether we'd had a row or not." He smiled. "I hope it's the latter."

To the generosity of this Pat tried to respond by saying sheepishly: "The latter it is." And then, with an effort and rising colour, "How's Margot?"

"O.K." But Fletcher knew he'd made himself ask it because he wanted to cancel out the impression he'd once been at some pains to establish that Margot didn't matter.

They got into the little car and were soon speeding away from Eastridge.

"I've come as a sort of ambassador," Fletcher explained. "Seems my dad knew yours once and he's keen to meet you. He would ask your dad along too, only he's got a certain feeling that he wouldn't come."

"I've a certain feeling that way myself."

"Well, never mind. You can come alone. I want to show you my gun and my camera." He stopped a moment, and added with less certainty, because he knew Pat professed dislike of expensive possessions: "That is, if you would like to see them."

When Pat admitted that he would, Fletcher added: "I've begun my first year. Medicine."

Pat said sharp and hard:

"You're a fool, Fletch."

And to this Fletcher replied steadily: "You see, there's a price to everything."

Pat was silent then, and for some reason he felt again that Fletcher had put him in his place. And he was still not sure whether Fletcher was a fool, or the finest bloke he'd ever known. . . .

He had no idea that his parents discussed his new interest. When he told them he was going to the Jennings the following Saturday, he made it perfectly clear that he was going for only one purpose: to view Fletcher's camera and gun. Otherwise he would have disdained to enter a Toorak dwelling.

When the day came his mother was in despair when he saw that he had chosen to wear a red tie.

"You can't go in that tie, Pat. What would Dr. and Mrs. Jennings think? Go and take it off, dear. Only loafers on the wharves wear red ties."

"There's no law against a bloke wearing a red tie if he likes."

"But you're going to a nice house. You want to look your best."

"I don't want to look my best. I want to show 'em. This tie'll show 'em."

"Show them what?"

"Just show 'em."

She wrung her hands; but he was adamant. Conal, however, scored more tellingly.

"Where's the light-blue tie your mother gave you for Christmas? It would help a lot. Didn't you say Fletcher Jennings had a sister?"

Pat threw him a look in which swift anger and startled surprise were mingled. Did Conal, after all, suspect something? But Conal was busy rolling a cigarette, and only the top of his head, where the round dome showed beneath the thin grey hair, was visible.

He felt it was against his principles to enter the abode of these representatives of the privileged class—but how could he refuse this heaven-sent opportunity of seeing Margot again? It was more than could be expected of ordinary flesh and blood. Still, as a talisman, as a pledge that he hadn't yet deserted to the enemy, he made a point of flaunting the red tie.

Fletcher met him at the gate of his home: a fine large structure in grey stone—more imposing even than Stephen's, as Pat observed with a sinking heart.

"Will you deign to enter the cursed territory of the Toorakers? I'll guarantee that you'll depart quite safely, with your skin whole, and your nice little prejudices unscathed."

Well, it was only to be expected that Fletcher would rag him a bit, and Pat knew he must suffer it. There was really nothing hurtful about Fletcher's teasing—it was so light and quietly amused.

They crossed the lawn, a wide lawn, velvet to the feet, and flanked by a row of close-clipped firs. Beyond the firs was the tennis-court. There a red-haired boy and a girl were playing tennis. The girl was Margot. It was the first time Pat had seen her since the memorable day at his uncle's house when he had

kissed her. He wondered as, on seeing him, she raised her racquet and waved it, if she were thinking of it too.

The red-haired boy was about to serve—which feat he then performed with so much force and ability that Pat felt very disconsolate.

"He's out for blood," Fletcher commented, watching narrowly. "Richard Clark, a Conservatorium bloke. Badly smitten with our Margot. As will plainly be observed when he relaxes and has time to think about it."

So this was he. This was the rival whom Pat would most gladly have engaged in combat then and there—and established his own supremacy for all time. It was damnable, though, how well the swine served. If only he'd learned to play tennis himself!

"Do you like him?" He asked Fletcher.

Fletcher shrugged. "Well, he's a neighbour, and we were all kids together. But he's really not my sort. Blokes like Richard are all over my head. He jaws about Bach and Beethoven as if he knew them personally . . . while I prefer a jazz band. . . . But you've got to admit he plays tennis like a demon. One of these days I'll have to take you in hand, Pat. . . ."

Pat greeted this without enthusiasm. He watched the game impatiently—he watched Margot, and wondered when he might have a chance to speak to her; much as he liked Fletcher's society, it was not solely to see Fletcher that he had come.

But Margot, a brilliant colour in her cheeks from the exertions she was making, was so bent on returning the balls that Richard Clark was sending her that she had no further opportunity of acknowledging Pat's presence, beyond the first salutation.

Pat felt bad-tempered and ill-used. Margot had been willing enough to spend hours in his company when there was no one else around—but the moment this red-haired bloke appeared on the horizon—well, it looked like *Finis*. Damn girls, he thought. It's all true enough what people say. Woman is fickle.

However he found that he'd misjudged her. As soon as the set was completed she came over to where he and Fletcher stood together.

"Hullo, Pat."

Her eyelids fluttered in a momentary embarrassment, which quickened his breathing and gave him to know that their last meeting was in her mind—but her handclasp was firm and comradely. Margot belong to the order that shake hands—a rite almost unknown to Pat.

“Take Ricky on, for mercy’s sake, Fletch,” she commanded her brother. “He’s in a wild, fierce mood, and no female can satisfy his lust for victory.” She turned to Pat: “Come and see our garden.”

Both her instructions were promptly obeyed. . . .

In the far corner of the lawn there was an oak-tree, dark green with the massive foliage of full summer; beneath it there was shadow, deep and ample, with only here and there a ripple of moving gold from the concealed sun. Margot sat down.

“It’s too hot to take on Ricky or anyone else to-day,” she said, absorbing the comfort of the mellow, green shade. “You’re wise to stay cool, Pat.”

He threw himself down beside her.

“Is he always as fiercely competent as that?”

“Ricky? Oh, yes. He’s terribly keen on whatever he does. It’s pretty tough, really. He can beat us all, hands down—even Fletch.”

Pat frowned. The more he heard of Ricky the less he liked him.

“Comes here often does he?”

Margot saw his expression, and the light of a smile lay behind her eyes.

“Don’t start by hating him, Pat. Wait till you hear him play the piano. He’s wonderful. People say he’ll go a long way.”

“He can go as far as he likes—so long as I don’t have to listen to him.”

“But Pat, you’ll admire his playing. You won’t be able to help it. He’s good, I tell you. Much better than I am. Why, it’s a compliment that he listens to me at all.”

Pat registered disbelief, and Margot had to reiterate her point.

“He’s lengths ahead of—us, Pat. He’s technically mature. He can tackle the most difficult works—things that make me shudder. And he’s helped me a lot. He’s——”

"O.K., he's wonderful." He interrupted her roughly. "Think I came all this way to hear you sing praises of that red-headed masterpiece?"

"Sorry, Pat." She leaned her back against the tree, and clasped her hands behind her head; above and around her the moving leaves cast a lacework of drifting pattern. "I'm glad Fletch got you to come. I thought perhaps you wouldn't."

"You knew I'd have to come."

He said it softly; for once he spoke softly, and without any of the usual arrogant self-assertion. He moved no nearer to her physically—but he was nearer to her. They looked at each other steadily, with a serious concentration, as if both were seeking a response to some inner questioning, an explanation of some inexpressible mystery, which they seemed on the threshold of apprehending. . . . But the force of it diminished, the moment fled. It was not yet; the far future held secrets perhaps, but secrets they were neither of them ready to unveil. Only the shadow had touched them with light fingers, and then retreated into the fastness of time to come. . . .

They relaxed.

"How are you getting on, Pat? Do you still like your job?"

"Job's all right. My boss is just the opposite." And his face darkened. For months he'd been restless and dissatisfied. The manager of the firm for which he worked, Blackburn, had a perfect talent for getting the worst out of him. He resented Pat's insolent manner, and Pat resented being ordered about by a man he didn't respect. With the result that Blackburn had come to exert a petty tyrant over him. . . . "Don't think I'll stick it much longer." So a half-formed thought came alive.

"What would you do if you gave it up?"

"Don't know." Moodily he dropped his chin on his raised knees and considered the question. "I don't know, Margot. But I feel like moving on——"

"Leave home, you mean?"

He found he did mean just that.

"What would your father and mother say?"

"Raise hell, I guess." He smiled. "It's only something

I'm thinking about. Daresay it won't come to anything. Don't tell anyone. I haven't told anyone—except you."

"Of course I won't." Margot was slightly offended. "Fletch has always said I can keep a secret as well as a boy."

He hastened to pacify her.

"I know. What I mean is—well, telling you—" He floundered. "Telling you isn't like telling anyone else. . . ." When he'd said it he thought how God-damn' awful it sounded—worse by far than he'd meant. It sounded so awful he coloured. "I—I don't mean that exactly. . . ."

"Why, Pat, I hoped you did." Laughter sparkled in her brown eyes. "It's a compliment, Pat. You mustn't make a girl a compliment and then take it back. It's not done, Pat."

She was teasing him, flirting with him, playing with him that age-old game—the most delightful game in the world. He caught her shoulders and pinned her back against the tree.

"He's sweet on you, isn't he?"

"Who?"

"You know very well who. That blasted marvel of yours—that carrotty calamity?"

"I don't know, Pat. You'd better ask him."

"Well, put it this way. Are you sweet on him?"

"Do I have to answer?"

"Yes."

"Then let go of me. I won't have answers forced out of me by torture."

He let go of her rather quickly at that, because he remembered how once before he had hurt her. But as soon as he removed his hands she rose.

"Come on. It's tea-time. The others'll be looking for us."

"But you didn't answer my question."

"What was it?" She pretended to have forgotten.

"If you're in love with Clark."

"I'm not in love with anyone."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

He would have held her again and kissed her, in that unpremeditated instant, but she slipped from his grasp.

"No, Pat. I'm not as easy as that."

It was clear that her favours were to be reserved. Because he had tasted them once, he need not expect automatic repetition: she was determined to retain the power to bestow or to deny. And as he followed her towards the house he could not quite decide whether he were glad or sorry she wasn't easy.

III

Indoors Pat had to face rather a trying ordeal—trying, because he was untrained in the elaborations of correct social intercourse (what he termed "party manners"). Margot presented him to her father and mother, and to the red-haired menace.

On closer inspection, Richard Clark appeared more supercilious, more adult, more poised, than Pat's worst expectations had painted him. He helped Mrs. Jennings with the tea in a way which might have been "sissy" if it hadn't been so masculinely capable. With Margot he was distinctly proprietary. After tea she asked him to play, which he proceeded to do—after donning a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles that made him look painfully intellectual—with an efficiency as great in its way as that which he had displayed on the tennis-court. Margot watched him, absorbed, and her absorption was most unsatisfactory from Pat's point of view. Richard's playing was technically faultless—one must admit it—but it lacked feeling, it was strangely soulless. Margot, however, listened, enthralled. Pat saw that to a certain extent, Richard exerted some sort of power over her: the power of his competence, the years he had in advance of hers. Yet Pat felt that she had not decided about her feelings for Richard. When she had said she was not in love with anyone she had spoken truth. There was a long time ahead of her—time for her to make up her mind whether it was to be Richard Clark, or Pat Donahue, or a third unknown.

For his part, Fletcher was bored by Richard's playing. He signalled his displeasure to Pat time and time again, but as everyone else was taken up by it he had perforce to suffer in silence.

Following what seemed to Pat far too long a session, Richard, almost as an afterthought, turned to Margot and asked her to play. Margot shook her head.

"Not after that, Ricky."

The name—her very refusal—angered Pat. But he made no intervention.

Dr. Jennings turned to him.

"I knew your father once, Pat. And I greatly value the three books of his I possess."

Pat was genuinely surprised.

"Yes," Margot's father continued. He rose and went across to the bookcase below the window. "I have them here." Everyone was listening, and Pat was glad to note that even Richard Clark was impressed.

Dr. Jennings took out the three slim, small books—the only three Conal had had published: two collections of his poems *The Gates of Morning* and *Seascape* and the prose work, *An Errant Soul in Search of Paradise*. It was years since they were written, before Pat was born, and he had never read them, although he knew his father had copies put away somewhere.

"A brilliant brain." Robert Jennings turned over pages with a thoughtful expression. "It's a terrible pity he never went further."

"He still writes for the papers."

"Yes, I know. And I read everything of his in the hope of recapturing the questing spirit that made his early work so important. But his books belong to a different era."

"Do you mean he was more optimistic when he wrote them than he is to-day?" Fletcher asked.

"Well, we all emerged from World War One with high hopes. It's different from the attitude you find now. In his poem *The Gates of Morning*, Conal expressed something of what my generation hoped for in the twenties. An inspiration which faded with the years. . . ."

"Why, dad, I've never heard you so gloomy," said Fletcher. "I thought you were pretty contented with your lot."

The doctor smiled, a smile like Fletcher's own.

"So I am. It was only when I started to think of the world

we might have had that I remembered the men who might have made it." He handed the book to his son. "Read it sometime, Fletch."

"Of course I will." He looked at Pat. "I had no idea your father was such a remarkable man."

"Neither had I," Pat answered, and it had indeed never struck him that his father's name was known in houses Conal never entered, revered by men he had forgotten. Dr. Jennings had spoken of Conal as if he were proud to have his son in his house. It was an amazing sensation.

Margot came over to them.

"I love poetry. I want to read these." She took one of the volumes from her father. "*An Errant Soul in Search of Paradise*. What an odd name!"

"That one's a little outside your scope, dear. Conal doesn't write for babes and sucklings." He smiled as he patted her smooth cheek. But with more gravity he went on: "That's why he was never appreciated. Too clever. . . . It's a mistake in this world. . . ."

"Quite right, sir," Richard Clark agreed. He strolled over to Pat, and actually offered him a cigarette, which Pat declined although he correctly interpreted the gesture.

Then Mrs. Jennings spoke. She was a tall, slim woman with brown eyes like Margot's.

"You must carry on from where your father left off, Pat." She smiled. "We'll expect it of you."

(You must lead the revolution I missed. . . .)

"Pat could do lots of things if he wanted to." Margot made her offering to the general approbation, and Pat warmed to it. D'you hear that, Richard Clark?

IV

After that, for a time, he went to the Jennings' every second or third week-end, and—a feature not lost on either of his parents—he wore the blue tie. Julie was consumed with the most

tumultuous curiosity, which Pat obdurately declined to satisfy, thus coldly thwarting a natural, feminine interest in what appeared to her a fast developing romance.

Conal, however, struck home. He evinced no particular interest and then one day, following a rather protracted visit, he remarked casually :

"Blue tie . . . spring i' the bud . . . and all roads lead to Verona, eh, Pat ?"

Immediately Pat looked self-conscious, and tried not to, which made it worse.

"I don't know what you're drivelling about. Where the hell's Verona ?"

"Juliet lived there. You know, Romeo's girl. . . . 'There is no world without Verona walls. . . .'"

Pat looked down, and then he looked up and laughed.

"All right. It's a bit that way——"

"Very much that way, if you ask me."

"As a matter of fact, I didn't."

"Same thing." Conal was looking rather pleased with himself. In a minute, by indirect means, he'd got further than Julie in weeks of costly frontal attacks. "Think she'll sweep your hearth, mend your socks, etc. . . . or is that too prosaic ?" he continued, pressing home his advantage in an effort to introduce a little hard reason into the unsubstantial mesh of first love.

"We're nothing like as far as that."

"No ? Oh, well, you will be. You're both very young."

And then, abruptly, it came out.

"We'll never get any further. . . . She's in a different set . . . and I've lost my job."

Conal refused to acknowledge surprise.

"First I heard of it," he said, and he began to prepare a cigarette.

"I know. I was going to tell you, only Mum—what will Mum say ? It was that bastard Blackburn ordering me about." He flared up. "I won't be ordered about."

Conal bent his head—a gesture almost of acceptance.

"He made me do lousy menial things, like buying his lunch for him, and washing his tea-cup. As if I were a servant—

or a slave. Me! I stood it as long as I could—and then I bloody well told him where he got off!”

“I’ll bet you did. . . . Now, consequently, you’re unemployed.”

“I’ll get something. I won’t stop till I do—even if it means—” he paused, “—well, moving on. . . .”

They looked at each other swiftly.

“So there is a world without Verona walls,” Conal murmured. . . .

It was true. Pat was growing more and more restless. Blackburn was only the first of a series of bosses with whom he fell out. Somehow he couldn’t hit it off with them: he couldn’t support being an inferior. His succession of jobs became almost a joke at Eastridge during the following six or eight months: he worked by turn in an accountant’s office, a large emporium, a bicycle factory—and the result was always the same: dismissal, or as Pat put it: he walked out. Of his parents, Julie took it most to heart. She feared that Pat was going the same way as his father. After a most promising beginning, she sensed a drift.

One day Pat had a letter from Hadley Rowe. They hadn’t seen each other for years, but they had kept up a desultory correspondence. Now, Hadley wrote to say that his uncle, with whom he had been raising poultry in New South Wales, had recently died leaving him the farm, and he was looking for a partner. He wondered how Pat would feel about coming to join him.

The suggestion arrived at a moment when Pat was temporarily unemployed, financially embarrassed, and hopelessly bored. It appealed to him strongly. An open-air life would present him with variety. He liked Hadley, and felt sure they would work well together. He urgently needed change. He was sick of Eastridge—the lodgers, the hundred unattractive odd jobs there were to do, his mother’s worries over money—he wanted to get away. And most of all he was tired of his own growing sense of responsibility, of the feeling that he should be pulling his weight, and wasn’t.

Without offering an explanation he had almost stopped going to see the Jennings family—to see Margot. He cared for her

none the less—perhaps he cared for her more—but the sight of her beautiful, orderly home, made him realize most forcibly the wide gulf that separated them. Here was he, without steady employment or any immediate hope of any, in surroundings into which he could not possibly invite her . . . and there was she, used to luxury, the beloved child of wealthy parents, with perhaps a promising career before her together with the means to realize it, or even failing that, a life of ease, comfort, adulation. . . . Besides meeting her in her circle of friends, being only one of many, was not enough for him—increasingly, it was not enough. There was more he wanted . . . more than he could have. He knew it very well. Margot had made it perfectly clear that the limit to her favours was firmly marked.

The result of all this was a most passionate discontent. And Hadley's letter presented him with release from it.

So one evening he came into the kitchen and announced his decision :

“ I'm going chicken raising with Hadley Rowe.”

His mother was at the table machining a rent sheet. Her hand resting on the wheel, she paused, her eyes darkening.

“ Pat ! After all those years at school—and what you might have done ! ”

It was at once an accusation and a lament. She had always built him up into a city-dweller, a white collared representative of the business world, and this was where her hopes had led him—back to Hadley Rowe, back to the uncivilized hinterland which had lain blackly in her imagination since the “ land ” killed her brother Fred.

Scenting a scene, Pat hardened.

“ It's a good life, Mum. Hadley says it'll do me fine.”

“ That boy ! ” Julie had never forgotten or forgiven Tiger's gang, whom she blamed directly for the bad start Pat had had—many of his faults she traced back to Hadley and Tiger. “ And just when I thought you'd made some nice friends.”

“ Hadley's as much my friend as Fletcher Jennings is.”

“ You haven't seen him for years. You don't know what he's grown into.”

Pat grinned. “ He's taking the same chance with me.”

Julie rose. She was a tall woman, taller than Pat, a fact he often resented. He resented it now: it was humiliating to be only on a level with a woman. He watched her as she came over to him, obviously about to frame an appeal. Conal, putting aside the evening paper, watched the two of them.

"Pat, dear, you must listen to me. I beg you. . . . I've never asked you anything as seriously. . . . You'll never amount to anything if you go off on these wild-cat schemes. . . . I know. I tell you, I know. I've seen it over and over, first with my own family, then with your father. . . ." Her voice broke. Pat was dreadfully afraid she was going to cry. To meet this eventuality he steeled himself: no sentiment, no emotion, should swamp the inner core of him, that thing which Catherine Donahue had called his integrity.

Conal averted the catastrophe.

"Let's all sit down and talk it over quietly."

Having no counter-suggestion of their own, they complied. Leaning across the table, his chin in his hand, Conal took over control of proceedings. First he addressed Pat.

"You've thought it out? You really want to go?"

"Of course."

"Think you'll hit it off with Hadley? Remember, in a small concern like this, you've got to get along with the other man pretty well. It's hell if you don't."

Confidently Pat answered:

"Hadley'll do me."

Conal nodded; he turned to his wife.

"Let him try it, dear. He can always come back again."

He can always come back again. . . . That was the last thing Pat wanted. This was to be the break he'd be subconsciously looking for longer than he knew. Before you could become a grown, independent being it was necessary finally to sever the childish ties that bound you to parents, to home. They would only hold you back, prevent you from maturing, saddle you with duties, obligations, responsibilities. . . . Suddenly, fiercely, he wanted to make a clean cut. That it was hard, even cruel, he knew. He knew it was going to hurt his mother. Yes, and for

all he wouldn't show it, it was going to hurt Conal too. In a way, he was their life.

And yet why should he be denied his own? Nature decreed that young beasts and birds must soon fend for themselves. They broke away without repining on either side. Why should man, more able and more adaptable, be held back by these clinging bonds of affection?

Still, for the sake of peace, and to obtain his mother's consent, he did not betray the fact that this was to be final. As it was, it took the best part of an hour for Conal, in his most persuasive manner, to convince her that it would not be for long, that Pat merely wanted a change of scene, that it would be the making of him. . . . Only afterwards, when Conal came up to his room, did Pat present him with the harsher aspect of the plan.

"When I'm gone," he said casually, strolling over to the window, "you can persuade Mum to let this room. I won't want it again. And she can use the cash."

Out in the dim twilight the roofs of the neighbouring houses stood black against the greenish sky; there was the vista of chimney-pots and irregular wooden fences—the scene in which Pat had grown to near manhood, with only brief thought of the wider horizons, the grander views, the splendour of a world beyond the close, congested frontiers of a city. Now he sensed it. Its imminence rushed through his veins like rising sap in springtime—the open country, brown paddocks, creek beds cool and green; oases in the sun-scorched plains, forests of tall gums, their stems white among the bracken, ridge after ridge of hills clad in undisturbed, virgin timber—in short, the Australian background he knew so dimly, which was so firmly cut off from the world he knew—the world of houses and streets and self-centred, suburban men and women. As he experienced the tide of it, Conal spoke from behind him.

"The parting of the ways. . . . All this has got too small for you, Pat. . . . Well, I thought it would."

His voice was as usual, but beneath it there was more than the ordinary tinge of melancholy, a deep note of . . . What was it? . . . renunciation. . . .

The colours were fading in the sky, a faint star or two

shimmered into light in the west. Pat, watching them, thought of the vaster fields over which they also shone.

"I won't say you owe us anything, because I don't think you do—particularly," Conal went on breaking a long pause. "But I would like you to remember that we are not . . . entirely disinterested in you. Your mother will expect . . . letters . . ." His voice trailed into silence.

Have done with it, Conal. Finish it, Pat thought. Don't tie me down with any obligation. I want to find out what being on my own really feels like. . . .

But to say it would be utterly, unforgivably callous. He simply maintained the silence which had developed, and after a while Conal left him.

V

As he was going through his possessions prior to his departure, he came across the manuscripts Keller had left him. He wondered what he'd do with them. They appeared to have no part in the new life he was about to begin, but—But, somehow, they were a responsibility. And he wanted finally to rid himself of all responsibility. He remembered that Margot had said that Keller had left him his music so it might not die with him. A strange legacy . . . a legacy he didn't want. . . . Destroy them? He was tempted. He wouldn't play Max's compositions again. Probably he'd never play the piano again. He would close that incident in his life.

He was about to burn them when a thought struck him. He'd give them to Margot. He'd pass on the legacy—transfer it. And at the same time he would have a last opportunity of seeing her. Thus he would make the end of that incident too—leave no untidy strands.

But this time the gods were against him. He left it until the day before his departure to go and see her—and she was away from home. It was December, and she was with the Stephen Donahues at Frankston. He was disappointed out of proportion, out of sense. . . . He had to leave the packet containing Keller's

manuscripts with Fletcher. He did not tell him what it was. Margot would understand.

"Tell her I want her to keep what's inside till I come back for them. Or if I don't ever claim them, they're hers."

"Dear, dear, this sounds like a last, fond farewell," said Fletcher. "Are you going to the South Pole or somewhere? . . . And before you go, you might tell me why you've stopped coming to see us?"

"I've been busy," Pat explained inadequately and untruthfully and then he told Fletcher he was going away, and where, and all about Hadley's poultry farm. As he listened, Pat saw something at the back of Fletcher's eyes: a hint of interest too great to be impersonal—a hint of envy. This was what Fletcher would have liked, and could never have, because loyalty for him was the biggest thing in the world. . . .

"You lucky devil," he told Pat feelingly, when Pat had finished.

"Chuck medicine and come in with us," Pat suggested. "I'm sure Hadley would take you on too."

"Don't tempt me. I've passed my first year. Think I can chuck it now?" He walked with Pat down the long drive towards the gate. "No, Pat, I've adapted myself. I'm even beginning to suspect I'll make a good doctor. I know I kicked a bit at first. But what's the use? Every Jennings worth his salt was a doctor. It's in our blood. It's—it's a sort of fate."

"I'd loathe to be in on any sort of fate," Pat said strongly. "The very fact of all the others being doctors would turn me dead away from it. I'd feel I was only part of a tradition—and not an individual at all."

Fletcher leaned against the wrought iron gate-post and lighted a cigarette thoughtfully.

"So I'm not an individual?"

Pat saw it wouldn't do that way. "It may be all right for you. I don't know. I can't know. I can only speak for myself."

Fletcher nodded, as if he thoroughly understood.

"Any message for Margot?"

"No . . . nothing. Just give her that packet. And—and say good-bye for me."

Fletcher gave him a look half humorous, half serious. "You can trust me with any message."

"Just good-bye."

What else is there? he thought as he walked away. Just good-bye. It's the only way to finish things. Everything's got to end someday. . . . It's fun while it lasts . . . but there's got to be a break sooner or later. That's growing up. Meeting people, and finishing with them. Perhaps it's more than just growing up. Perhaps it's life. A good clean break. No regrets. Good-bye, Margot. Simple, final, strong. . . . Yes, that was the show you made, a show you tried to put on even for yourself. But could you truthfully say you wouldn't go back—to Margot? He'd said things to her he'd never expected to say to anyone. He'd kissed her. At the back of everything he felt dimly that, no matter how many other girls there were, he'd have to come back to Margot. . . .

Next morning he left Eastridge. It was very early. In the grey light Julie gave him his breakfast. She hovered about him while he ate it, looking extraordinarily tall in her long, green dressing-gown. Because he would permit her no other way, she was trying to express to him her tenderness, her pain at his going, through the medium of food—by administering to his physical requirements in the vain hope of somehow teaching the inner, spiritual fibre which evaded her so completely.

Pat knew that, by giving him everything he most liked to eat, she was trying to convey something to him. But somehow he wanted neither the token, nor the food. . . . He wanted to get it over with. He wanted to go.

She raised the subject of letters.

"You'll write often to me, won't you, darling? And I'll write to you once every week. I'll never miss. I promise."

Hastily he promised to write. Julie sometimes forced him into such a position that only a lie would extricate him. Conal never did.

"I'll keep your room just as it is. You can come back any time you like, and it will be ready for you."

Damn. . . .

"Why not let it, Mum? Make some more money."

But she wouldn't hear of it. Pat's room would always be Pat's room. The sun must fall from the sky before she would alter that.

At last breakfast was over. Pat got his bag and put on his overcoat. He wished the next few minutes could be cut out of time and somehow lost. Still, they couldn't. . . . He kissed his mother, and she clung to him. As gently as he could he released himself.

Conal came in with a topcoat over his pyjamas. He hadn't combed his hair, and it stood up, thin and grey and ruffled, round the bald patch on the top of his head.

"I'll see you to the tram," he said. They went out together. Pat was not one to care about appearances, but he was very glad it was yet too early for anyone to see how awful his father looked.

The sky was overcast and a cold east wind blew. It was unbelievably drab and depressing. They had to wait a long time for the tram which would take Pat into the city and the station. That wait seemed interminable. Pat paced about, nervous and impatient, while Conal stood with his hands in his pockets, a damp cigarette stuck to his top lip, his feet in down-at-heels slippers, his crushed grey pyjamas apparent above his skinny ankles. Pat had never seen him look more untidy, nor heard him cough as frequently.

At last, to his unspeakable relief, the tram came.

"So long, Conal."

"Good-bye, Pat. Good luck."

He hadn't expected that Conal would shake hands—but he did, and something papery and stiff, something that crackled, was transferred, by the gesture, from him to Pat. Pat got on the tram.

He sat down and looked at what Conal had given him. It was a ten-pound note. He had no idea how his father had come by it. Ten quid. . . . He'd never had so much money in his life.

He hadn't said thank you. He'd hardly said good-bye. He'd wanted only to finish it, to get away. And all the time Conal had been holding this. Probably he'd sold something to get it,

something he valued—or else had saved it somehow, put away a little at a time, denied himself things. . . .

Oh, God, thought Pat, I'm the most ungrateful swine alive. Oh, God, Conal. . . .

Never mind, he thought. I'll write. I'll write as soon as I get to Hadley's. I'll write and thank him, I'll say good-bye properly, I'll tell him how marvellous he's been and how ungrateful I am, and—and all the rest. . . .

With this thought he comforted himself. But the letter to Conal was never written.

VI

Hadley met him at the small railway station, which was on a branch line forty miles from the Murray on the New South Wales side.

Hadley had grown into the lanky, lean young giant, with unruly limbs and unco-ordinated movements, which his early years had indicated. He was outlandishly and brilliantly dressed in brown jodpurs, green shirt, scarlet handkerchief knotted about his neck in approved cowboy fashion, and a wide-brimmed hat of dark plum colour. Pat didn't know just what to make of this show, but there was no doubt about the warmth of Hadley's welcome.

"Good old St. Partick. Good on you, mate. How goes it?" was the greeting he received as he stepped out of the train, and felt the weight of Hadley's hand-slap across his shoulders.

"Hullo, Had."

He was immensely at ease, elated to find Hadley unchanged, sure he had made the right choice. In the heat of the wayside station, with the sun blistering the wooden railings and platform, and drawing sharp, eye-splitting light from the agonizing silver of the rails, they renewed their interrupted friendship.

"The hens'll take to you all right," Hadley grinned. "You've got a dependable look. . . . I always thought you were the pick of our bunch."

Pat glowed.

"Let get out of this bloody place." Hadley proposed, and he led the way through the platform gates, where a sleepy guard was induced—apparently much against his will—to take the tickets Pat and the three or four other passengers offered him.

"I've brought Isabel to meet you," Hadley said as they went out, and Pat looked round for the inevitable skirt. However, all that met his eye in the dusty glare of the street was a ramshackle car, which looked as if it had been put together from a collection of spare parts, and then recklessly driven through all the dust in Australia. This was Isabel.

"She's a blinkin' marvel," her owner proudly explained. "Her little engine never surrenders—no matter what I make it do. Her seating accommodation is not exactly large—but she'll manage two blokes—or, mark you, a bloke and a sheila—won't you, Isabel, my pet lamb?" He stroked the shabby mudguard affectionately. "She's some dame, my Isabel," he said, as he signed to Pat to enter the uncommodious vehicle, which was, indeed, little more than an engine, and four wheels. "I'll give you a lend of her, Pat," Hadley promised generously, as he set to work on the crank. It was an effort in the blistering sun. Isabel gave little assistance, and the sweat was soon running down Hadley's forehead and into his eyes. A more obstinate car to start than Isabel never existed, Pat was to discover—and he often compared her in his mind to Fletcher's beautiful little racing model.

A mechanic in overalls from a garage opposite strolled over to proffer verbal assistance: it would seem that he had seen Hadley having trouble with Isabel before.

"I told you you'd have to get a new battery," he said, watching Hadley's efforts with supercilious amusement. "Why don't you listen to good advice, Had?"

"I should think I know what's best for my own car," Hadley retorted, wiping his damp brow with his sleeve. He took this opportunity to rest and perform a social duty. "Meet a cobbler of mine, Len—Pat Donahue, who's goin' to help with the blasted chickens."

Len accepted the introduction with a careless nod. He was older than Hadley, about twenty-four, and good-looking in a

way, but his eyes were small and his glance oblique. For some reason Pat took an instant dislike to him. It might perhaps have been jealousy, for in spite of Len's lackadaisical air, he obviously knew cars inside out—which was more than Pat did—or Hadley.

In the end it was Len who got Isabel started, and with a sudden lurch they moved off, Len calling after them :

“Meet you to-night outside the Royal, Had.”

“Okey-doke, I'll be there,” Hadley shouted. “I'll bring Pat along. Can you fix him with a girl?”

“Trust me.”

Hadley laughed.

“There's a dance on,” he told Pat. “Me and Len and another bloke called Charlie Winfield are making up a party with a sheila apiece. You'll be in on it.”

Pat frowned ; this was the last thing he'd expected—or wanted.

“I don't dance.”

“There are other things to do at a dance,” Hadley replied suavely, “besides dancing. . . . But if it makes you feel a fool not to be able to, I'll learn you a few steps. A little goes a damned long way, you'll find, my son.”

When he saw that Pat was still frowning he continued : “I'm afraid your education's been a bit neglected. Mind you, I thought it would be when your Uncle Hadley went away. . . . What happened to Jem Watson's sister? Violet, wasn't she? That kid was cock-eye about you. Is she still?”

“I don't know—or care.”

“Now, now, don't be hard to get on with!” Hadley protested, narrowly missing running over a child and three dogs. “You can't be choosy—what with all the shortages. You ought to be glad to get what you can.”

“I wouldn't be glad to get something I didn't want.” And Pat wished he'd leave the topic—which didn't interest him particularly.

Unfortunately it interested Hadley profoundly, and he proceeded to give Pat a highly coloured account of what purported to be his amorous adventures—which left little to the imagination. He had always had a loose, audacious tongue, which Pat had

once greatly admired, and tried to imitate. But now he discovered he wasn't quite as amused as he used to be. This, indeed, was the way he'd heard blokes talk—the way he'd talked himself—right back as far as he could remember, even into the days when he hadn't had the remotest idea what it was all about. Now he knew well enough, but for the first time he found such talk offensive. What the hell had worked this change.

As they drove down the main street of that most typical country town, with its main store, its couple of balconied hotels, Hadley pointed out to him the headquarters of the various sheilas of his acquaintance: one at the store, one at the post-office, and the golden-haired one at the circulating library, who waved to him. . . . Hadley, it would appear, had made conquests everywhere.

Outside the second of the hotels, Hadley slowed down.

"Let's have a spot . . . it's that dusty my throat's givin' out. . . ."

And Pat was forced to own that drinking, like dancing, was an accomplishment he neither knew nor wished to acquire.

Hadley stared at him—a curiously, comprehensive glance, that contained in it a suggestion of unfriendliness. It was as if a cool wind had ruffled the even surface of their once happy association.

"The blokes in my set'll give you the go by if they find that out. You'd better snap out of it quick like."

Pat's thoughts flashed to an image of Conal, bent, coughing, rummaging for the bottles hidden in the old play-box. . . . That picture contained the whole of his refusal. But Hadley couldn't see it. Hadley had no conception of it. And Pat couldn't show it to him. Hadley only thought he was being queer, difficult, sissy. . . . "You mean you never want to know what it feels like to get properly shot?"

"No."

"Christ, what a life! No drink, no women. You might as well have died young. Seems like we didn't call you St. Patrick for nothin'."

Pat raised a clenched fist and held it before Hadley's eyes.

"Remember what it feels like?" he asked.

And Hadley laughed.

Immediately friendly relations were restored. Pat might not be addicted to all the things Hadley admired and thought, but Hadley knew—he had reason enough to know—the power that lay behind Pat's punches. He knew well that Pat with all his strange notions was a fighter of no mean worth, and by Pat's appearance it would seem that the years had only tended to increase his ability in that direction.

They drove on, out of the township, along an incredibly straight, an incredibly dusty road, past paddocks brown and sun-scorched, sparsely grown with stunted eucalyptus trees and gorse, an isolated farm or two. On the horizon there were hills, thickly timbered and darkly green. Pat hoped that Hadley's farm was somewhere in that vicinity. He had never felt such heat in his life, his clothes stuck to his back, his throat was parched with dust, and still Hadley rattled on about girls, the blokes in his set, a little, but very little, about poultry. . . .

At last they drew up at a small weatherboard house with a corrugated iron roof and water tank, set too far forward, so that the dust from the road lay thickly on the few bushes that struggled to exist by way of a front garden. Behind the house was an odd assortment of outhouses, hen houses, chicken-coops . . . the whole suggesting neglect, disinterest, lack of enterprise.

This first impression Pat was to find even more accentuated, but apparently it did not strike Hadley, who cried gaily :

"Welcome to Lord Rowe's ancestral estate !"

VII

The weeks went on, and Conal and Julie waited for letters. A few came, scribbled notes which told them little, almost nothing, haphazard, desultory. . . . The unsatisfactory nature of them made Julie angry and unhappy.

"He's busy," Conal said. "When he's less taken up with this new thing we'll hear more from him."

"You're only excusing him," Julie answered. She leaned

her elbows on the table, and dropped her chin into her hands—work-reddened hands, swollen at the joints, so that her wedding-ring was caught and immovable. "There's no excuse. He should write us proper letters."

And because she was disappointed and tired, she sat down and wrote to Pat, a long, upbraiding letter, reproaching him with ingratitude.

Things had not been going well with Julie lately. The lodgers all seemed to want something extra—at the same time. Mr. Wainwright, who was on the staff of a daily paper, wanted his meals at the most inconvenient times (as if gas rationing wasn't trial enough), Mr. Jordan didn't see why, as Mr. Traynor had supper served to him, he shouldn't have the same, old Miss Sagood was laid up with a cold and required her breakfast brought to her on a tray. There was no end to the wrangling over small (but, to Julie, terribly important) matters. Clarice threatened to get married, and must at all costs be restrained, at least until after Easter. . . . Besides all these minor calamities, Julie was faced with a major one: she was growing stout. One day, to cheer her spirits, she went to buy a new ready-made costume. All those fashioned on slim lines would no longer fit her, or, if they did, they failed to fasten.

"Madam would be more comfortable in one of our out-sizes," the sales-girl suggested.

"I'm not out-size," Julie answered angrily. "You could let one of these out a little, and it would be quite all right."

The girl looked bored, showed her there was insufficient material to let out.

"These are all too small for madam," she concluded frigidly.

"Then I'll go somewhere else."

"Certainly, madam."

But wherever she went, it was the same. The trim girls who helped her into the frocks indicated that she was past wearing clothes cut to the same pattern as theirs. As she steadfastly refused to take a large fitting, she had to do without her new summer suit.

"Stout women always look old," she thought to herself bitterly. "But I'm not old. Thirty-eight isn't old. It's all

the work and worry." For two or three years now Julie had celebrated a thirty-eighth birthday: against reason, she made time stand still.

She adored clothes. She could spend hours gazing through shop windows at the waxen maidens whose flawless figures perfectly displayed the season's latest achievements. She haunted the show-rooms. She went through racks of dresses for the mere pleasure of handling the silk, the velvet, the woollen materials. When, in former happier days, she had gone forth to buy a gown, the world had taken on fresh lustre, and she had realized the zenith of contentment. Especially she loved brilliant colours: reds and blues and greens; she had a positive mania for them. Once, soon after she was married, Conal had said to her: "When you wear bright colours you make me think of paintings by the old masters." Julie never forgot that. Without telling him, she had gone up to the National Gallery, and studied what masterpieces were there. Especially she observed the famous Van Dyck, and other works of the Flemish school. It was true. Here was a golden-haired madonna in red and blue, angels and saints in violet and green. If she wore these colours, she would make Conal remember. . . . It was only one among many of the disillusionments she was to know, when she discovered how soon Conal ceased to notice what she wore. . . .

And there was her hair. It had lost its smooth sheen, and when the bright auburn faded, she found a few grey hairs. She was indeed growing old before her time, and it had been only the rich colour of her glowing youth that Conal had really loved.

But there was still one person who never failed to look at her with eyes of pleased approbation, who was always ready with the small compliments she craved, who never failed to make her feel that she was an outstandingly attractive woman. This was Alfred de Courcy Traynor.

One Sunday afternoon they had tea together at the Botanical Gardens. It was a mild autumn day, without wind, and heavy with soft, sun-diffused mist. After tea they strolled down to the lake and found a seat there, looking out over the motionless water with its reflection of trees and clouded sky.

Julie wore a frock of dull green cloth . . . not new, but

carefully renovated, and adorned with fresh lace ; she had a small, becoming hat that particularly delighted her, fashioned out of green ribbon and pink silk roses, and worn at an angle low down on her forehead. It made her look younger than she had done for some months ; and the repose and quiet of the scene caused her own expression to relax into a similar repose, a similar quiet. Mr. Traynor's glance left her in no doubt as to the satisfaction her appearance afforded him.

"I'm glad to see you taking things easy for once, Julie," he remarked with a smile, after they had idly watched the graceful black-plumaged swans for a time. "We're such good friends you and I, that you musn't be angry at what I'm going to say to you."

He paused, as if waiting her permission to proceed ; then taking silence for consent, he went on : "You've got far too much work and responsibility. I don't like to see it. Your husband doesn't help you in the least. It's not fair. Pat's let you down, too. It makes me furious."

Julie felt she should protest, but somehow it didn't seem worth the effort.

"I've long given up expecting Conal to do anything," she answered, after a moment. "He's just let himself go."

"That's it ! That's what I complain of. A fine person like you being tied to such a man . . . And I know he's always encouraged Pat to be cheeky and unmanageable."

Julie held a similar view herself. With one part of her she knew she should not discuss her men with an outsider, but the temptation to do so, engendered by the sympathy she was receiving, was too great.

"I'm afraid Conal likes him to be pert and cocky. He thinks it shows character," she said. "He lets Pat call him by his Christian name, and treat him exactly as if he was the same age. Once when Pat was little he started calling me Julie. I stopped it straight away. I knew it wouldn't do. You can't let kiddies take liberties. They don't have no respect for you then. And then you've only got yourself to blame for letting them start it."

"That's right," Mr. Traynor endorsed emphatically. "If Pat had been left to you to bring up he would have been a well-behaved

thoroughly likeable chap. It's a shame. You haven't had any co-operation."

Julie felt the tears start to her eyes. Alfred was bringing to light all the half-formed thoughts she had buried deeply for longer than she knew; but she felt she must deny it.

"He is likeable; he's really a dear boy. I'm sure he doesn't mean that surly temper. Sometimes I think it's only shyness. He is shy, you know."

Mr. Traynor had never found Pat in the least shy; he considered him the most bumptious, insolent and utterly detestable boy he had ever met. Indeed, he had often seriously contemplated changing his place of abode, purely on Pat's account. However his friendship with Julie kept him at Eastridge; so he had by some means or other to bear with her son.

"It's like you to stick up for him. You're so wonderfully loyal, Julie. But I'm afraid your loyalty isn't being properly appreciated . . . either by Pat or by . . . your husband. . . ."

It was then that she became conscious that the discussion was not drifting idly, but was travelling in a certain direction—more, that Alfred Traynor was deliberately guiding it. Her eyes became alert, and her body tense. Mr. Traynor noticed the change.

"I could give you much more," he said, coming boldly into the open.

Julie's hands met and gripped together. She was nervous, but not displeased by Alfred's protestation. She had known intuitively that he was fond of her—perhaps, even, a little in love with her. She could hardly pretend to be surprised.

"We could go to another city—Sydney, if you like. I could easily be transferred. You could have an altogether different life. I wouldn't let you work like you have to do here ever again. With me, you'd be free to do as you chose. Think of it, Julie darling. You could be happy."

And so he went on, building for her a glittering dream world, which, in her heart, she knew to be hopelessly unsubstantial, for all that she toyed with it, and fondled it, and almost believed it was possible of realization.

To go away. To live in Sydney, as she had always wanted.

To call an end to the drudgery, the makeshift compromises with the lodgers, the subterfuges to get money. . . .

"You could arrange a divorce with Donahue," Alfred was saying. "Then we could be married."

A divorce. Conal would, not only by his superior right, but by the deeper bond there was between himself and Pat, retain his hold on their son; she would lose Pat. Besides, there was something vaguely disreputable about the word divorce. True, there were divorces every day in Hollywood, and Julie's standards were, up to a point, Hollywood ones. But they had been superimposed on a basis of decorum, of respect for the gentility she aspired to; for her there was a profound difference between what was permissible in Hollywood, and what one might do in a suburb of Melbourne.

"Please stop, Alfred. It's all quite impossible——"

Her words brought him rather unpleasantly back to earth.

"What do you mean—impossible? Of course it isn't. People are always arranging these things. . . ."

"Yes, I know. I don't mean that. I mean it's impossible—for me. . . ."

Traynor was nonplussed. "You're not still holding that girl against me, are you?"

Why must he bring that up? Julie thought. It was past, finished with. . . .

"Because if you are," Mr. Traynor went on hurriedly, "I can only say that if it did happen—mind you, I don't say it did—but if it had, it would only have been because you had cold-shouldered me at the time . . . because you turned me off for that crazy foreign bloke. . . . You treated me badly, Julie. And I'd have done anything for you——"

"But there was nothing between you and Doreen. You told me so yourself, And I believed you."

Well, if she wanted it that way, she could have it that way.

"No, there was nothing," he agreed.

But the reference had destroyed the last vestige of Julie's mirage of happiness. Although she was romantically-minded, she was, at heart, cold to passion. She didn't want it. And she had some very conventional ideas of what constituted decent

behaviour. The god of her highest reverence was respectability.

"We'll have to go," she said rising. "I'm grateful for what you want to do for me, Alfred . . . but, after all, we're good friends. And that's enough for me."

"But it's not enough for me." Her sudden lack of response bewildered him, but he was determined to see the thing through in the correct, approved-of manner. "I can only think you haven't understood me. I'm in love with you, Julie. Do you think it's easy for a man of—of . . . feeling, to stand by and see the woman he adores slighted, imposed on, by a man who isn't worthy of her daily sacrifices?"

To this last appeal she made no answer, and he felt it had fallen on barren ground; but it was to stay in Julie's mind for a long time. She was to recall it over and again. She was to weigh up and try to balance the losses she would sustain by leaving Conal with the gains she would receive as wife to Alfred Traynor.

One day old Miss Sagood who somewhere despite her crustiness had a soft spot for Julie, a lasting, unselfish affection which Julie was not to find in many of the men with whom her life was so closely bound, spoke portentous words:

"That Traynor's been here long enough. An unattached male hasn't any business to be too long in one place. It's high time he pushed on."

VIII

Pat hadn't been more than a week or two at the poultry farm before he understood why the place looked neglected. Hadley released from restraint by a somewhat tyrannical and Puritan uncle, was too bent on cutting a figure in the town to pay much attention to his feathered capital. He did the minimum of work necessary for keeping the place going, but evening found him on the road, driving his dilapidated-looking car in the direction of the day's real business.

Pat knew Hadley's exploits were very much exaggerated: he wasn't by any means the lady-killer he pretended to be. But there was no denying he had fallen in with a poor lot—youths all older and riper in experience than he was—Len Smithers, Charlie Winfield, and two or three more. None of them commended themselves to Pat. They drank. They talked incessantly about girls. He had no contacts with them.

For their part, they started by jeering at Hadley's cobber—much to Hadley's humiliation, and it spoke well for his loyalty that he did not abandon Pat. However, they soon grew tired of it, and were even reluctantly compelled to admit that Hadley's cobber was eminently handy, practical and resourceful when it came to the point of getting things done.

Because there was nothing else for him to do, Pat really got down to poultry raising. It amused him to wield a hammer—he mended the hen houses, he got some paint and painted the homestead: he renovated, he constructed. Under his care, the hens multiplied, laid plentifully, hatched out young. He talked with more practised farmers at the few farms he visited nearby. He even sent to Melbourne for books on the subject. In a few months the place underwent a marked change.

During this time he gave very little thought to his father and mother. When the pressure of work permitted he scrawled the brief notes his mother found so unsatisfactory. As time went on, he neglected to do even that.

He set to work to make a wireless, buying the parts a few at a time, spending hours tinkering and experimenting with an aerial which became a landmark for miles around.

Hadley marvelled at so much industry. He said it exhausted him to look at Pat. He tried to induce his partner to enjoy life a little more—to go into the township in the evenings and meet some girls—but resolutely Pat refused. When it was his turn to take the eggs in to the station, he combined the visit to the township with the purchasing of those things he needed. But so much did he find to do at the farm that his absence from it were singularly few.

The sight of Hadley's Isabel inspired in him the wish to produce something better. His desire to have a car became a positive

obsession. He felt that, if only he had sufficient funds, he could achieve a vehicle vastly superior to Hadley's. But Conal's ten pounds having gone on spare parts for the radio, and the poultry business making small return for all the labour he was expending on it, the immediate prospect of having a car of his own was certainly not bright. However, he firmly resolved that no effort should be spared in order to reach that ultimate goal. Life without a car could not much longer be supported.

Hadley, however, saw everything differently. Hadley was in the throes of newly gained freedom, he was twenty, uninhibited and carefree. Once a strong woman-hater, he had now girls on the brain. And the more he saw that Pat wasn't interested, the more he tried to interest him in his conquests. Myrtle at the post-office, Sally at the Royal, Beryl who ran the local circulating library. According to Hadley, he'd slept with all of them. Pat didn't quite know whether to believe it or not. Perhaps, he had with one, and was multiplying by three. It was all too circumstantial to be pure fiction.

Hadley affected to be appalled by Pat's virgin state, and sought to rectify it.

"Something's wrong with you," he told Pat. "Haven't you ever wanted to get a girl in the dark?"

Pat would have liked to deny it, but he couldn't. Even Margot—whose very image he felt was smirched by Hadley's indecency—well, hadn't he crushed her hands and eagerly desired her lips? Hadn't he forced his mind away from mental contemplation of more intimate pleasures? Hadley might have gone a lot further with the various girls of his acquaintance . . . but could Pat honestly say he hadn't wanted as much? It seemed to him a vile thing that such thoughts should attach themselves to his dreams of Margot. But they were there, crowding in, especially when Hadley talked like this, lewdly jostling his ideal.

As Hadley watched his face, a sudden light dawned. "I believe you've got a girl—all proper and regular and respectable like."

Fiercely Pat refuted it. If once he allowed Hadley to think there was someone, he'd never hear the end of it. Besides Hadley wouldn't understand. He'd lump Margot along with

Myrtle and Sally and Beryl. . . . Margot, whom the very fact of separation had carved more deeply. . . .

"You're only about ten thousand miles out," he said.

But Hadley was sure he was somewhere on the track.

"Your Uncle Hadley's never more than a mile out—and not often as much as that. I think I'm smart—see? No one's ever made me out anythink else. You're just the sort that'd get all burnt up over some piece—and don't you tell me different!"

"I do tell you different." He was beginning to get annoyed.

"Now, see here, Pat." Hadley swung his legs off the table in the tiny living-room, and sat bolt upright in his chair. He pointed the stem of his pipe at Pat. (Doggedly Hadley persisted with that pipe, although Pat knew for a fact that the first couple of times of smoking it, he'd gone outside and been sick.) "I like you, but I don't seem to trust a bloke what don't drink, and what don't go with girls. See what I mean? Besides, my set's talking. They call you names. It ain't no good to a bloke when his cobber gets called names. . . . Now, keep you wool on." For Pat had jumped up so violently that he upset Hadley's tobacco.

"You've said enough, Hadley Rowe. Now you listen to me. I don't like your friends. And what's more I'll prove 'em wrong—and you too."

"O.K., Pat." Hadley looked as if he feared he'd gone too far.

"I'll show you," said Pat intensely, "that I can have any damned sheila I want. See?"

"I see," said Hadley grinning, and it was that grin which decided Pat. He'd cut Hadley out with his favourite girl-friend. He'd do it if it was the last thing he ever did.

When he had cooled down, though, he began to realize the task he'd set himself. He didn't want to bother with any girl—or, at least, any girl except Margot. He was happy in his work. Going into the township would be a hell of a bore. Still, a bloke couldn't have his virility insulted and make no move to assert it. The thing would have to be gone through.

Now, which among Hadley's large coterie was the favourite?

Pat used strategy and deduction, and finally came to the conclusion that, for all there was safety in numbers, Hadley—Don Juan Rowe—had a distinct partiality for Beryl.

Beryl was the golden-haired damsel at the circulating library. She had slim hips but a well-developed bust; when business was slack she had a habit of standing in the doorway of the library with her arms folded, ready to engage in conversation any male passer-by. Like all Hadley's friends, she was older than he, and had, for a small country town, a sophisticated, metropolitan air.

Beryl it should be.

IX

Easy enough to become acquainted. He went in pretending he wanted a book. Beryl could show him only novels—love stories like his mother read, and out-of-date, at that.

"No travel books—or scientific works?" he asked, momentarily distracted from the ulterior purpose of his visit, and suddenly deciding that to read a book in the evenings wouldn't be such a bad idea.

"I'm afraid not." Beryl had hazel eyes, rather wide open; she looked at Pat with unconcealed interest. "You don't read novels? Somehow you don't look as if you did. I can almost tell the sort of books a person reads, just by looking at them."

"You must be good at your job," Pat suggested, remembering the game he was supposed to be playing—and she was obviously ready to play.

Beryl fluttered her eyelids, which were long—but not as long as Pat's. She made more use of hers, however.

"Aren't you Hadley Rowe's friend?" she inquired.

"Yes. I'm Pat Donahue."

"And I'm Beryl Farrer." She smiled—and no wonder, she had dimples. "How do you like poultry farming?" she asked conversationally—a common acquaintance having established them on a friendly footing.

"Oh, it's all right," Pat answered, without enthusiasm.

"Lonely out there, aren't you—cut off from people?"

"Not particularly . . ." And then remembering: "I am a bit."

"I never see you at dances and things."

"I don't dance."

"It's a pity. There's not much else to do of an evening . . . if you haven't a car."

If only I had a car, Pat thought. . . .

"Ever go for a walk in the evening?" he asked, seeking an alternative.

Beryl dropped her lashes—as if he were going too fast for her. So he looked around the shelves again. A woman came in to change a book, and he whistled idly until she had gone.

"I'll try a Western, I think." And he handed it to her to stamp. It was unfortunate, in a way, that the cowboy on the cover bore a striking resemblance to Hadley. . . . Beryl appeared to notice it too, for she said:

"Hadley's got a car."

"A rattletrap of a thing that won't start," Pat retorted. "I wouldn't have it on my mind. Someday I'm going to have a car that amounts to something."

Beryl was properly impressed.

"How marvellous that'll be."

"I'll give you first drive in it," Pat promised, warming to his subject. "I'm reading up on cars, and I know a hell of a lot about 'em. Wireless too. I've got a beaut at the farm. Made it myself. There's not much about wireless I don't know."

"You must be awfully clever—Pat." She used his name experimentally, and looked at him sideways to see how he would take it. "Do you mind—? I mean, I won't if you don't want me to——"

"It's nice of you to call me Pat—Beryl." He really was getting on well. This was easier than his most sanguine expectations. Hadley should just see him.

He turned to go—but he pretended to change his mind, and came back.

"There's a full moon these nights. How about a little walk—as far as the creek . . . ?" He paused.

Beryl dropped her eyes and dimpled.

"You're a fast worker, Pat, and no mistake. The boys were wrong about you——"

"What did they say about me?"

"Oh, that you haven't got much go—but they're pretty wrong. Aren't they?"

Now it's here, he thought. This is my cue. This is where I come in. If I play this scene right, I'm right with her. He leaned across the counter—and for the first time he used the long lashes he'd once disdained—he used them as capably as Beryl had used hers—the drop, the flutter, and then, wide open, the blue eyes which had worked so devastatingly on the emotions of Violet Watson . . . and of which Margot Jennings had not been entirely insensible.

"You can find out for yourself—if you want to."

He said it softly, with somewhere beneath his words a smothered menace, which was partly a challenge. Her eyes met his, and he saw her acceptance, her dawning realization of attraction. Cynically he saw it, and felt his power.

"To-night?" he asked.

She nodded.

He could hardly bear not to tell Hadley that evening as they ate their improvised meal. He went as far as to say, off-handedly:

"I've got to go into town to-night."

Hadley raised his eye-brows.

"You don't say! Sorry I can't offer you a lift. I'm not going in. Felt pretty used up to-day—must be the heat."

"Then will you give me a lend of Isabel? You once said you would."

The audacity of it delighted him. To drive in to meet Hadley's girl in Hadley's car—it was a masterpiece of devilry.

Hadley demurred.

"You wouldn't be able to manage her. Only I know her little secrets. Only I can make her behave like a lady."

But Pat was so persuasive that in the end Hadley was forced to give in. He came out onto the back porch to see Pat's departure, and was immensely chagrined to perceive the little difficulty Pat encountered in starting the car. Indeed he

got away better than ever Hadley had done. As Isabel moved off, Pat at the wheel turned to wave. He did it with an expression of impudence, and Hadley didn't respond. He felt somehow that his car and his friend had entered into some nefarious partnership, and were determined to betray him. Why else had not Isabel played her usual pranks? And where the devil was Pat going? He only hoped that the engine would stall, or the petrol tank spring a leak, or the tyres—he didn't know what fate to call down on his beloved tyres.

Beryl lived at a boarding-house behind the station. When Pat honked the horn she came out promptly. She was wearing a short white frock, and a white satin ribbon confined her amazingly bright hair; her legs were bare except for a pair of pink bobby socks, her arms too were bare, and her face rather heavily made up.

"I thought it was Hadley," she said, as with some difficulty she managed to squeeze into the confined space beside him. "I knew it was Isabel's horn."

"Had's sick to-night. He loaned me the car."

"That was nice of him. Did he know I was going out with you?"

"Not on your life."

Beryl laughed; if it were possible she moved closer to him. Pat got the idea that something was expected of him. An arm? Of course, an arm . . . an arm about her, and a hand cupping her left breast. At first the touch of it alarmed him—so soft beneath his hand, so smooth and close beneath her light frock; he hardly liked to continue with the pressure. But Beryl didn't mind. It would seem that this was expected of him. And how much more?

The moon was just rising behind the gum trees. The gully through which the creek meandered was some three miles from the township; it would have been a long walk, especially on so warm a night. Pat thanked his stars for Isabel. Driving with one hand, and inexperienced at the wheel, he only narrowly averted catastrophe half a dozen times, miraculously avoiding tree trunks, and just missing overturning on the rough creek road which twisted sharply as it descended into the wealth of

ferns and bracken. It was as well Beryl didn't know he had driven only a couple of times before and had never qualified for a licence.

When they reached the gully they got out. The air was cool here, scented with the damp, leafy perfume of hidden growth. A cricket chirped, and they heard the steady, tinkling clarity of water rippling over stones. Stumbling among fallen tree-ferns, they scrambled down to it—a narrow, hurrying waterway, forcing a channel for itself through the dead and fallen branches, silver where the moon caught it, passing in and out of shadow. Pat filled his hands, and found the water ice cold.

Beryl sank down on the mossy bank, and watched him take off his shoes and wade out to a large flat stone, where he sat for some minutes, fascinated by the purposeful, persistent life of the stream. Then he came back and sat down beside her.

"This is Jake," he said.

"Like it, Pat?" She smiled at him in the shadows. "You're a boy for quiet, aren't you? Stopping every night by yourself at that lonely farm, when Hadley and the rest of us are having fun. Why do you do it?"

"I've got plenty of work to do."

"Yes—in the daytime. Had says you work like a nigger. But night's no time to work. Night's a time you get lonely on your own. . . ." Her voice faded, and he began to know more things were expected of him. (There was no doubt about her being co-operative: even a little more co-operative than he'd bargained for.)

"I like you, Pat," she went on softly. "You're different. I don't quite know what you're thinking. That makes me not sure—but it's rather nice for a change . . . not to be sure. . . ."

"You're sure with Hadley?"

"Oh, yes. Had's an open book. He's a nice kid, and lots of fun—but he's not very deep, if you know what I mean. It's all on top with him—nothing underneath—no. . . ." She struggled among the limited resources of her vocabulary . . . "no imagination."

The word sounded depths in him—far away, rooted things, that found an echo, and held it a moment. . . .

"What makes you think *I* have?"

"I don't know. The way you look, maybe——"

Pat laughed.

"Cripes, how awful! I don't want to look different from other blokes."

"But you are different." She maintained it so forcibly that he took it up.

"In what way?"

"I told you. You don't dance—or have fun. . . . Why, look at us now!"

"What's wrong with us now?"

She didn't answer, and if ever silence held meaning hers did. He could see her dimly white among the ferns, her hair touched faintly with the pale light, red lips parted in a slight smile, as if he amused her, as if she wanted to tease him a little. . . . Margot had liked to tease him a little . . . and he'd had to show her his strength, the latent, physical force he could command. . . . Outlines were so vague in this shadowed place that the girl smiling at him among the ferns might almost have been Margot . . . for in the darkness all girls were white, all lips red. Darkness transformed, beautified, intensified the urgency of loneliness; and the night made any girl Margot.

A girl in the dark. . . . The words he hadn't liked came back to him. Haven't you ever wanted to . . . ? Hadley had said.

A slight tremor shook him from head to foot. . . . Oh, Margot . . . I love you, Margot . . . I never said that to you, did I? Perhaps I'll never say it. . . . Because life's like that. It's the people you don't want who are always so damned easy. . . . Margot had said she wasn't easy.

It had been perfectly obvious from the start just how easy this girl was. . . .

He pushed her back among the ferns, and the crushed, scented leaves gave out a sudden deep breath, like an emanation from the earth. He shut his eyes, so that her lips should be Margot's. . . . The touch of her was the touch of Margot—Margot, relinquished and forced back into his memory. . . . That was the danger—the lurking danger, a danger he hadn't for a moment counted on—that his need of her should be so passionately aroused

that he must compromise with the material to his hand.

He hadn't guessed there would be this element in his heartless pursuit of Hadley's girl.

X

When he came to himself he found that, of course, she wasn't Margot, or anything in the least like Margot. She was Beryl Farrer, probably five years older than he was, and certainly as practised in this sort of thing as he was not. Even to think of her in terms of Margot was to tarnish the very texture of his ideal . . . to darken the secret palace of his dream. . . .

When he woke the next morning on the back porch, where he'd chosen to move his bed on account of Hadley's late hours, a great wave of despondency swept over him.

That sordid little episode by the creek had no real contact with what he felt for Margot. He had been mad . . . mad to be swept away like that . . . madder still to imagine Margot into the scene. He thought of the night he'd stood beneath the pines by the sea and heard her playing Debussy . . . a moment of sheer, magical beauty . . . an upward, spiritual groping, that had left him with wet lashes and a burden of happiness too great to talk about. . . . Out of that had come this brutish urge for possession. He was ashamed.

He thought of Margot, serene in the atmosphere of a cultured home, enhanced by her background, respected as she deserved to be, loved. . . . The daughter of the house—the old-fashioned phrase struck him forcibly. There was grace about it, a strong, fine quality: the daughter of the house. . . .

That was the position she held. And there was Margot, the person, the individual—teasing him, flirting with him, suddenly serious, with a fleeting tenderness, with moments of fire—but fire firmly held in check, so that there was not a moment she was not mistress of herself and the situation.

He thought with admiration of that fine control, that certainty of hers, that chastity. . . .

Yes, it was the word. He knew it was the word. Margot said she wasn't easy—and, by God! he was glad of it. Otherwise she might have given to all who sought it what the other gave so freely. He felt that chastity in women was a thing—in spite of what Hadley and his kind might say—to hold in reverence.

And he revered it during those waking moments of shame as deeply as he had so lately betrayed the image of it.

XI

His mood of despondency lingered throughout the day. He hardly spoke to Hadley. He went spiritlessly about his habitual tasks with his mind elsewhere.

What was he going to do about Beryl?

He didn't want ever to see her again. Last night when he'd driven her home, she had seemed to assume that he'd really taken up with her . . . that their association was to continue. She would expect him to return. She'd look for his return. She wouldn't understand how he could want her . . . like that . . . once, and not any more. She just wouldn't understand.

The days slipped by, and he didn't go into the township. His taciturnity made Hadley curious.

One night about a week later he was awakened by a violent tug at his shoulder. He opened his eyes to find Hadley at his bedside, and the moonlight flooding the back porch. Hadley was in a furious temper.

"I'm goin' to have this out with you, Pat Donahue, before I get to bed. Otherwise I won't sleep a wink. . . . You're a nice sort of clobber to have, I must say!"

"What's the row?" Pat asked, struggling to assert himself over sleep.

"What's the row indeed! You know bloody well what the row is. I've been talking to Beryl."

"I suppose you mean Beryl's been talking to you." He tried to make it sound casual—but he wasn't feeling casual,

and the tendency towards drowsiness had quite disappeared.

"Don't put me off!" Hadley shouted. "Beryl asked me what had happened to you lately—and I soon got it out of her. . . . You've been poaching on my territory, and I won't stand it. Like hell, I won't, I've a good mind to kick you out!"

"I'd like to see you kick me out," Pat snorted. "And where would the place be without me? Who does all the work around here?"

"I managed all right before you came—and I can always get someone else. Someone I can trust—who won't double-cross me. . . . I hate a bloke who acts like saint, and then sneaks off with his cobbler's girl and keeps mum about it. . . . If you wanted a girl why did you have to pick on mine? There's plenty of others. You dragged Isabel into it, too, damn you." Even before this tender reference to his car, Pat had had a suspicion that in spite of his fine talk Hadley vastly preferred Isabel to any of the girls for whom he professed devotion.

"It was your own fault," he said sullenly. "You were always throwing it up at me—you and your precious friends—that I couldn't get any damned sheila I wanted. Well, I can, see? I've proved it. I can have any damned sheila I like." (While he said it, though, he knew very well that he couldn't have the one girl he wanted.)

And Hadley struck him—a lucky blow that got him right in the mouth and drew blood. And then, not for the first time in their lives, they were fighting each other. Over the bed, and down the short flight of steps to the yard, where a surprised rooster, disturbed in his slumbers, arose to salute a false and noisy dawn.

After that they didn't speak for days.

Gradually more friendly relations were restored, but there was a rift between them. ("You've got to get along with the other man pretty well. . . . It's hell if you don't," Conal had said, and Pat remembered it.) He knew he hadn't treated Hadley properly. Even if the girl was no better than the next, still Hadley had found her first. So she should have been the very last girl on earth for Pat. He hadn't altogether thought along these lines when he'd started the thing. He'd merely

wanted to pay Hadley out for taunting him. He tried to excuse his action with this thought: it was Hadley's fault—Hadley had brought it on himself. But he knew that if he and Hadley were to get back to where they'd been before he'd have to offer some sort of apology. And that he could not do. He'd never put himself in the wrong in his life, never apologized to anyone for anything. He just couldn't do it.

As it happened, however, things worked out well for him. Hadley came back from town one day to say that Beryl had taken up with Len, the motor mechanic. He should have been miserable, but he didn't sound miserable, and Pat noticed his reactions were not those of a lovelorn swain. Perhaps he'd got tired of Beryl, perhaps he was already looking for her successor, perhaps he'd decided that Beryl's morals were too promiscuous even for him.

They had fun together all the evening, and just before they parted for the night, Hadley said with an awkwardness he vainly tried to cover:

"No sheila should ever come between two old cobbbers. I've always said it—and I wouldn't be surprised if it's a bit true."

It wasn't very handsome—but it was the best Hadley was capable of. It was more than Pat could do.

But he spent some hours the following day giving Isabel a thorough cleaning and overhaul.

Once or twice he saw Beryl in the township. Sometimes she was with Len, sometimes she was alone. When she saw Pat, she would toss her head, and look boldly into his eyes, offer him a flippant word or two—and he would carry it off as well as he could, but he would go on quickly, because she was one of the things in his life he didn't want to remember.

XII

His interest in Hadley's car was no ephemeral thing. He found that it was growing into an absorbing passion. He discovered also that he had two hands which were no mean servants.

They responded admirably to all the demands he made on them. He had long been aware of the fact that each of them possessed an inherent power of its own—hadn't he mastered the intricacies of carpentry, of putting together a wireless, even of playing the piano? (Not to mention the striking effect produced by a well-delivered left drive.) Yes, these hands of his, controlled by a brain more agile than he'd let his teachers see, were going to take him places.

As a result of tinkering for hours with Isabel, people got to know that if anything went wrong with their car, their wireless or any other mechanical device, Pat Donahue at the Rowe's place would as likely as not be able to fix it. And nine times out of ten, Pat Donahue did fix it.

Hadley was surprised and not altogether pleased by Pat's growing reputation. His brilliant attire and nonchalant attitude had previously excited some comment in the neighbourhood. Now Pat was drawing attention to himself for more sterling attributes. Hadley didn't like it, because those attributes Pat displayed were not the ones most highly esteemed by his confederates, and because they made him unsure of his former ascendancy over Pat. . . . After the quarrel over Beryl had been patched up, they began to bicker about small things. For instance, Hadley objected to Pat's liking for classical music. The music Hadley preferred set Pat's teeth on edge.

"After all, it's my wireless. I should think I could listen to what I like," Pat remarked on one such occasion.

"I'm surprised at you goin' in for that highbrow stuff. It's not for blokes like us. Be your age," Hadley advised him. "Chopin . . . Brahms . . . they just don't belong, I reckon."

"They belong with me." Once Pat wouldn't have admitted it. Now he had less respect for Hadley's opinion—and more for his own. Music belonged to some of the best moments of his life.

"I can't make you out, Pat," Hadley declared. "You ain't the bloke you used to be. Something's gotten into you." And he shook his head sadly over Pat's decline.

But their main point at issue—their ultimate and irreparable

disagreement—had its root in the root of all evil : namely, the distribution of profits. They just couldn't settle what Pat's percentage in the undertaking was to be. Hadley wavered in vicinity of the thirties, but Pat demanded a straight out fifty-fifty basis—and nothing less would satisfy him.

"I do the work," was his constant claim—not a very popular one with Hadley.

They got down to it properly one bitter winter's evening, after a day of wading about among the hen-houses, through slosh and puddles, in an incessant downpour. With much trouble, Hadley had got the damp wood to light in the open fire-place, which hadn't had a fire burning in it for a year, and smoked abominably in consequence. They were checking their balance sheet for the six months since Pat arrived, and the question suddenly loomed gigantic between them.

"You asked me to be your partner," Pat said. "A partner goes equal shares."

"But it's my place," Hadley expostulated. "My uncle left it to me in his will. It's all mine . . . legally."

"What's that matter? Everyone puts into a business what he can—some give capital, others labour. They're equally important."

"The way you talk anyone would think I do nothing." Hadley spoke with real, harboured rancour.

"They wouldn't be so very wrong either. You swagger about dressed up like Gary Cooper, but the place would have gone to the dogs if I hadn't turned up and got it on its feet."

Hadley got very red.

"The way you swank, Pat Donahue, is absolutely sickening. I'm sorry I ever offered you a job——"

"Offered me a job—I like that!" And Pat's own temper began to rise; they faced each other across the hearth, oblivious to everything but their fury with each other. "You said you needed a partner, and I came to share with you both labour and profits. As for this being your place—well, no man's got any right to private ownership. All land should be held in common, just as the goods it produces should belong to all who work on it." Close association with Hadley had lately blunted his speech—

but now he was expressing himself unselfconsciously in the language of other contacts.

"I don't give a damn for your Communist theories," Hadley retorted.

"No, because they don't suit you. You'd be a capitalist slave-driver, if you could."

"By God, I would—and so would any man if he had half a chance. Comfort—ease—security—I'd sell my soul for 'em. And so would you. Otherwise why stick out for half the profits?"

"Because they're my due. I ask no more. I'm giving as much as you."

So it went on—the old-new argument, fought out in bitterness through past ages, fresh and spontaneous in each young generation—the wealth of labour.

Neither of them yielding an inch, Hadley was at last goaded into saying,

"All right. If you won't take what I'm prepared to give, you can get out."

"Suits me." Pat rose, his hands in the pockets of his oil-stained grey slacks. "I've thought about it before this, I've been getting fed up for a long time. I think I'll hitch-hike to Sydney."

"You can hitch-hike to hell, for all I care!"

Later, Hadley showed some signs of a desire to compromise—but Pat was adamant. He had had enough of poultry farming. The old restlessness had come back. He was ready to move on. Seeing he was determined, Hadley, being in reality the weaker of the two, had to make a last appeal. It came rather inappropriately at the end of a long tirade, in which he had attempted to make it quite clear that he was glad Pat was going, that he was sick of hearing him skite, that he hoped to God he'd never set eyes on him again. . . . And after all this he broke off, and finished lamely: "Oh, hell, Pat, what's the use? I don't want you to go."

Strongly Pat drove in a wedge. "Then you'll make it fifty-fifty?"

"I can't do that exactly. But——"

"It's good-bye then."

"All right, blast you, it's good-bye." And Hadley stormed out of the room. In the last ditch, it would seem, he had his principles too.

Pat knew him well enough to sense his disappointment, and he was sorry in a way that their association had to end like this. But he had no mental contacts with Hadley. Hadley had never sampled Marx, he'd never read a single word of Jeans or Wells or Bernard Shaw—he knew not Hemingway. Besides, he had little practical ability. Pat would have forgiven him his lack of intellectual status if only Hadley had been able to construct usefully, to make the business of chicken raising pay. . . . But, in the final analysis, Hadley took things far too much for granted, his grasp of reality was too light a thing, and he had the mistaken assumption that gay talk and an attractive personality were sufficient to get him through.

XIII

Julie had known for some time that Conal wasn't well. It was for this reason that she kept Alfred rather at arm's length, and gave him no definite answer to his oft-repeated suggestion that she and Conal should seek a divorce. After all these years, she was not going to desert him if he needed her. She was not made that way. She tried to explain it to Traynor, but she only succeeded in convincing him of the fact that she was afraid of what people might say about a wife who left a sick husband in the lurch. That was true, but it was not all the truth. She had long ceased to love him—but there were a hundred other ties of habit and long endurance that bound them together. And there was Pat. She knew Conal was missing Pat badly. She was missing him too. As if by common consent they spoke of him seldom; they evaded an acknowledgment of the sharp incision his going had made in their lives.

Conal's cough was worse; often it racked him, and she noticed he sometimes held his side as if he had pain there. She tried

to persuade him to see Dr. Ross, but Conal professed no faith in medical men.

"It's only the poor type of tobacco we're getting now," he would say, and she tried to convince herself that it was, against her perception, her intuition—her certain, sure knowledge.

The lodgers came and went. The latest arrival, a man named Clement Keer, was lately returned from Central Australia. Conal turned to him with a revival of an old, buried enthusiasm. Julie often found the two in an absorbing conversation, and almost she could have smiled. This interest of Conal's in the sparsely settled centre of the continent had always puzzled her.

"You see, I always wanted to go there," he tried to explain to her one night. "For me it has come to represent . . . El Dorado . . . Elysium. . . ." He had been talking late with Clement Kerr, and had entered their room to find Julie lying in bed reading a novel.

Now she laid it aside and yawned.

"You'd probably be bitterly disappointed in it if you ever did go," she said prosaically.

He sat down on the edge of his bed and began to untie his shoe-laces.

"You can't tell, Julie—you don't know. It may be the one place for me . . . the only place. . . ."

"You've always had these ideas, Conal—always wanted to be moving. It's no good. I've tried to anchor us."

He murmured something which sounded like: "You can't anchor the spirit." Then more strongly: "It's not all desert. Vast stretches could be brought under cultivation, if we had the men and the will. Now it lies dormant awaiting the day when it will spring into life. . . . That day's still far off. It's not for me or for my generation. . . . Now it holds out hope only of peace of rest, the solace of all sequestered places, where time stands still. . . ."

Having removed his shoes, he raised his hand to undo his collar, and suddenly he seemed to choke. He tried to cough, but there was only that dreadful choking. Julie sprang up alarmed, caught him as he swayed, and somehow got him across his bed. There was a red stream at his lips, which soon stained the

sheets and the white counterpane and her nightdress. . . .

"I'll get the doctor," she gasped after a little. "You're ill, Conal. I'll ring Dr. Ross."

"Wait until the morning." The paroxysm was over; he wiped the scarlet stain from his lips. "The morning will do. . . . I'm for it, in any case. . . . Think I don't know?"

"Oh, Conal. . . ." His calm, his acceptance amazed her. "You haven't looked after yourself. . . . Why wouldn't you take care. . . . You should have taken more care of yourself. . . ."

"Life doesn't let you take care of yourself. . . ." And then, seeing her expression. "Don't be afraid. It's all right." He spoke as if he were trying to pacify a child: the way she'd often heard him talk to Pat, when Pat was a child and had had bad dreams at night. "I'm not afraid, darling, so why should you be?" He reached out and took her hand; he even smiled slightly. "We've come a long way together, haven't we, Julie? A long, long way. . . ."

Towards morning he began to toss about and to talk strangely.

After Dr. Ross had seen him, he called Julie out of the room. He was very grave. She saw by his face that there wasn't much to hope for.

"You should have sent for me sooner, Mrs. Donahue."

She struggled to protest. "Conal was so against it. . . . Is he—is he very ill?"

"He must be removed to a hospital at once. But I'm afraid there's little can be done at this stage. He's let himself get beyond us. . . . Where's the boy?"

Julie's eyes darkened. "In Sydney. You think he should be sent for?"

"I think you should advise him that his father is . . . critically ill. . . . Then it's up to him." And he proceeded to give her some medical details, which Julie was too disturbed to grasp.

Afterwards, when she went back to Conal, he seemed brighter.

"Is old Ross going to pack me off?"

"You'll be more comfortable, dear," she prevaricated, and then, "I'm, going to write to Pat, and tell him to come back."

But Conal objected with a fierceness that surprised her.

"No, Julie, no. Don't bring him out of the sunshine . . . into this. Illness is an untidy business, a damned untidy business. Don't force it on to him."

"But he should be here, Conal. It's his duty. People would say——"

"People!" His scorn was deadly. He had never in his life cared for other people's opinions—their censure or their approbation left him as he was . . . untouched.

But silently Julie resolved to send for Pat. I'll write to him to-night. It will be a way of getting him back. He'll come back for Conal. . . . And Stephen, too, must be told. . . .

Conal seemed to be asleep, but still with his eyes shut, he murmured, as if echoing his thoughts of the night: "The lost land . . . always there beyond the horizon, only a step or two to reach it, but never reached. . . . The silence of it, Julie, and all those stars. . . . I didn't know there were so many stars. . . ." The morning sun lay behind the drawn blinds; she sat motionless and without words. He had always been so strange—she had never understood him. If this were his mind, it was no wonder they had traversed different roads.

He talked much of this unattainable land for which he had sought all his life, he talked of the God whom in his youth he had forsaken, but with whom he felt himself irrevocably linked. Long-forgotten penance rose to his lips: "We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts . . . and there is no health in us . . . our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed. . . . I desire to enjoy thee inwardly but I cannot take thee. . . . I desire to cleave to heavenly things but fleshly things and unmortified passions depress me. . . ."

It was slurred, rambling talk. Once she heard Pat's name . . . and then, suddenly, clearly: "There's beauty, after all. . . . Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Peace. . . . He lingered over the word, endowing it with an infinite longing, an infinite love. . . . It was the last intelligible word she heard him say.

Her letter came to Pat in the midst of springtime and blue water and majestic shipping.

Here was the city Conal had decried as over-populated, soulless. . . . Well, for once Conal had been wrong. Or else he had outgrown the exhilaration of the cosmopolitan life of a seaport, the hustle and gaiety and crowded thoroughfares, the intoxication of blue skies and bluer seas.

At first, though, Pat had had his taste of insecurity, of wondering where he'd be next week if he didn't land a job soon. He'd been scared all right—scared of having to give in. He'd walked Sydney streets till his shoes wore out, and the small sum of money he'd saved as Hadley's employee—not partner!—had diminished with alarming rapidity. He'd even been forced to sell his beloved radio. Some of his mother's despairing utterances had come back to him, and some of Conal's more philosophic ones. They had known what this was like, and the knowledge was something they hadn't wanted him to share. . . . Well, now he was sharing it. But as to confessing himself beaten—that was something he would never, never do. No, not if he died for it.

He thought once or twice of the aunt—his mother's sister—who lived at Rose Bay; but he rejected the notion of going to see her. When he had a job he'd go. He'd go and impress her and his cousins with his maturity and his confidence. But while he was down at heel and jobless it would look too much as if he were coming for succour.

When he was practically at the lowest point and was seriously wondering whether he could exist on a single meal a day—food, he found was damnably expensive, especially when you had a remarkably capacious stomach—fortune smiled again. A garage proprietor, convinced (and secretly amused) by Pat's ability to sell his talents—engaged him as a junior assistant.

The garage was not far from Circular Quay, and from the doorway he could delight his eyes with the constant coming and going of lordly liners, of weather-scarred tramps, of blithe ferry-boats, beneath the wide span of the bridge you'd seen in pictures but not fully realized until the first sight of it caught your breath

with its immensity, the beauty of its sublime arch, the power which hid itself in fragility when the lights transformed it into a-spangled crescent.

And into this Julie's letter intruded: "Conal is critically ill. The doctor thinks you should come home. . . ." As he read it he felt cornered. Was this a trick of his mother's to bring him back? She always exaggerated. Probably Conal wasn't very bad. Besides, what could he do? There was nothing on earth he could do.

He decided to leave it for a bit, and then wire for further news. Perhaps by now Conal was better. He tried to build on his mother's tendency to dramatize, because he'd arranged to go swimming at Manly with a couple of youths he'd got to know on the following Sunday, and he didn't want his plans upset.

On Monday he wired, and the reply was quite uncompromising: "Return home at once. Mother."

It was during the tedious hours of night, while the train rushed through centuries of darkness, that he thought suddenly of the ten-pound note Conal had pressed into his hand at parting. The scene came most vividly back: the cold street, Conal in his dressing-gown and slippers, the brief farewell—and then the realization of what Conal had given him. It might be said that that was the last he'd ever seen of Conal. . . .

Had the long hours of sleeplessness, in which he passed from a lighted world into a no-man's-land of scudding shadows and shapeless outlines, made him apprehensive? Was there real fear growing in him for what he might find when he reached his journey's end—or was it only the cold prelude to dawn which was undermining his assurance?

Something was keeping him awake. While the others in his compartment dozed, he stared out into the night until his eyes felt strained and heavy, considering—and yet refusing to consider—the prospect Julie's letter and telegram had called to his mind. Something most final, something for which he was entirely unprepared.

Unbidden, the sight of Conal at the street corner slipped into his consciousness. The money Conal could so ill afford, obtained from God knows where. . . . He'd meant to write and say thank

you. . . . Of course I meant to write Conal. You know I meant to write . . . not one of those hurried stupid notes that told you nothing . . . but something real, honest . . . something that expressed, or at least tried to express. . . . You knew I meant to write, Conal, he went on saying over and over to himself helplessly. You knew I meant to write. . . .

But how should Conal know ?

xv

When he saw his mother's face he knew. It was there in her pallor, her red, blurred eyes, her unsteady hands and lips. He knew and yet he refused the knowledge. Conal couldn't be dead. It wasn't possible, when there was so much to explain, so much to put right between them.

"Pat, dear, he's gone. Last night. They sent for me after midnight."

After midnight. Those hours rushing through darkness, when for the first time fear had stabbed him.

"No," he said, desperately rejecting it. "No, no, no!" The words rose on his lips until they filled the air with their strident echo. As if they were the words of someone else. When he recognized them as his own, he put his hand against his mouth to silence them.

"You might have come sooner," Julie said.

The cruelty of that tore him unmercifully.

"How was I to know ? I didn't know—" But he could have come sooner, he could have written, he could have said thank you, he could have remembered. . . . Oh, God, will I always be haunted by the spectre of what I might have done ! I never felt before that I'd like to say I'm sorry. If Conal were here now I could say it to him. But he isn't here to say it to. . . . When at last I can say it I'm not going to be given the chance. . . .

"He was all right when I went away," he muttered in an attempt at justification.

"No, he wasn't, Pat. He hasn't been well for a long time. I thought it was just the drinking . . . but it was more than that. His lungs were affected. How he must have suffered, poor dear. . . ." She wiped her eyes; then she proceeded to give him some account of Conal's symptoms—and Pat stood there silently hating every word; his youth and his strength turned aghast from the horrible details of disintegration.

"He's lying in the mortuary chapel, and the funeral's to-morrow," she went on, the tears which came so easily to her, brimming to the surface again. "Stephen will be there, and Dr. Jennings and his son. They've all been so good, Pat. . . . But I'm glad you got here in time for it. . . ."

What did the outward form of funeral panoply matter? He was too late for all that counted.

But what was his mother saying?

". . . And little Miss Jennings came to see me when she heard. I thought it was so sweet of her. She said she admired Conal's poetry. . . ."

Yes, that was like Margot . . . although he hadn't expected it. Well, it had been a good thing he hadn't been here. He couldn't face up to Margot—at least not yet. He felt that if she looked him in the eyes she'd see that narrow road twisting through the ferns to the creek . . . and if she should see it, the warm friendly light would fade in her own eyes, and he would probably have no more contact with her. . . . Foolish thought. As if it were possible. Margot could see nothing. She could not know of his betrayal.

No comfort anywhere. Conal was gone, and he'd let him down. He'd let everyone down, as far as he could see: he'd failed his friends at every climax, he'd broken faith with his one romantic love. . . .

"I'm not here in time," he said. A wave of desolation swept over him. To come home and not find Conal was too strange to believe—and yet it must be believed. "Did he—did he say anything—leave any message?" he asked, his lips beginning to shake.

"Only that he wanted you to be happy. He didn't want me

to send for you. He said he didn't want you brought out of the sunshine."

He caught his breath, and she longed to take him in her arms. She knew he was on the verge of losing command of himself—and he had not done that before her since he was a small child. She saw how he had grown, filled out—how strong his shoulders were, his hands. . . . He had gone away a child, and come back a man, and she yearned unspeakably over the child who had been and the man that was.

"Your room's still there for you, Pat."

She had kept it exactly as it was, awaiting his coming, nothing moved, nothing touched or altered. She knew that Conal had gone up to it sometimes, and she had dusted and aired it. But even in his absence Pat's room had still been Pat's room.

He gave her a look, as if mutely he thanked her, and went out.

XVI

He pushed open the door, and entered the dim, low-ceilinged room which once seemed like his private kingdom. Now he was conscious of its shabbiness, and surely it was smaller than it used to be, more closed in, viewless. The livestock was gone, but there were other relics of youth—absurd to his new manhood. Poor and comfortless it was, but the desolation of it was in him too; desolation and bitterness such as he had never known.

His eye fell on the old play-box. Idly he raised the lid.

Still hidden from his mother's eyes, the whisky bottles lay before him. Here was a way to get rid of this terrible feeling of insufficiency. Conal had taken that way. Why shouldn't he?

With deliberation he removed the cork from one of the bottles and raised it to his lips. Unprepared for the fire of it, he spluttered, coughed. Angrily he persisted. Why not?

Fellows were going to laugh at him every time he refused to drink with them—it marked him down as unconvivial, queer. We didn't call you St. Patrick for nothing. He had never wanted to be different from the majority. He wasn't a kid any more. He was a man—a man who had had intercourse with a woman, whose lips should be no longer virgin to the taste of spirits. . . . But as he drank he saw Conal's bent form, he heard him coughing, and he realized in Conal's prematurely aged face something of the despair which drove him to ever deeper drinking. What part had Pat in such things? His hope was the future. He was strong where Conal had been weak. All his pride was in his strength. . . .

Have you learnt to say "no" yet?

The words came with such clarity that he turned round quickly, almost expecting to find Conal there behind him. He was quite sure Conal had spoken. Then he began dimly to see that he was never going to be finally cut off from Conal. Conal's roots were too deeply in him—roots of the spirit, carrying the sap of freedom to his mind. Conal had wanted him to grow into the man *he* might have been. . . . Perhaps you'll lead the revolution I missed. . . . And when Conal had said that he hadn't been thinking of any popular political persuasion: he had meant something far more fundamental.

Yes, Conal had wanted him to be strong—and strong for some reason, some purpose. . . . He replaced the cork, and put the bottle away. To-morrow he'd get rid of all the bottles. This was not for him. He would not touch drink again. Like the strong man dedicated. . . . What was he thinking of? And who was the strong man set apart for some service, who drank no wine? . . . He couldn't remember where he'd heard it. He hadn't read it in a book. Conal must have told him the yarn when he was a kid.

Conal had told him wonderful yarns. But he'd always made it clear when he was recounting legend, and when he was voicing truth. Unlike some parents, he had never insulted Pat's intelligence, even his immature intelligence, with fabrications. And he never spoke fortuitously; every word counted. . . . What is gold to me? I want much more than that? . . . Not Alexander

flushed with victory can behold a world his to conquer quite as splendidly . . . the flesh sated and the soul starved (Pat knew now what that had meant) . . . words which may stir faint echoes but can never be militant again until the spirit returns. . . . Life, liberty . . . you don't have to show me Keller's letter . . . the inward questions of your own soul . . . great potential powers for good. . . . All this has got too small for you—well, I thought it would. . . .

And more, much more. Conal had died, and to-morrow they would bury him, but there was something which had escaped the clutches of the dark, unsatisfied tomb. It was the bright part of him—the vein of gold which saved the base metal from extinction ; the indestructible essence, poured out by an unknown omnipotent creator . . . and never completely lost. There was something here great with the majesty of truth only vaguely realized and just beyond the rim of understanding.

With all his faults, his weaknesses, his shortcomings, Conal had known what the liberty of the individual meant. And he'd wanted Pat to feel it for himself. He wouldn't force it on him. Rather would he stand by and watch it flicker out, than impose himself between Pat and that inner voice. But earnestly he had wanted Pat to find it for himself—in himself, because little that was good really came from outside. It grew in you, part of every experience, every person who had ever meant anything to you.

Margot. Max Keller. Hadley. Fletcher. The gang. . . . Each of them had contributed, to a greater or a lesser degree, to his development : his contact with each of them had left him a little different, a little further along the road. . . . Deeper, more subtle than any of these, was the tie that bound him to Conal.

But above them all there existed an individual, a being unlike any other, answerable to no one . . . except himself, and the spirit waking to life within him.

Someday, perhaps, he'd frame a declaration of independence for Australia, perhaps he'd lead a revolution—a revolution which would lay open the way to a wider application of the spirit of freedom for all men . . . perhaps he would, perhaps he wouldn't. In the meantime, he must build on the foundation

fashioned with so much love and so much pain, in exultation and in humility . . . in order that the inner voice should not cry out . . . that it should be satisfied with a destiny fulfilled.

For him, to-morrow was a new day.

XVII

Early in the new day, before anyone was astir, he got up and went down to his mother.

It was very quiet and still, the hush before sunrise: into the silence a blackbird sang, saluting the revival of living.

There were things you must do, words you must say. No longer could you evade the gentle, insistent pressure of a commitment too long deferred. There were things you had to do to keep straight with yourself. He'd said that to Margot, but it was then only an utterance of reason. Now it had a more vital aspect—because it was painted with the blood-red of emotional experience.

It would be a hard day to get through, and he was going to need all his fortitude. But it wouldn't be quite as hard if he did first this thing he had to do. . . .

He went from the freshness of morning into his mother's room: close impregnated with the floral perfume she used, over-decorated with pink hangings and photographs and gaudy ornaments—Julie's only refuge into personality, in a house that had no privacy, no personality.

She opened startled eyes.

"Why, Pat, have I overslept?" She turned anxiously to look at the small clock which stood on the table by her bedside. She had a constant dread of oversleeping, of keeping her guests waiting for their breakfast; it haunted her very dreams. Now, however, she relaxed. It was only half-past five: another half-hour before she would have to rise. But that fear allayed, another took its place. "Is anything wrong, Pat?" He looked

larger and forbidding, almost with the appearance of one who had come to upbraid her.

"Can I talk to you?" he asked abruptly.

"Of course, Pat."

He went over to the window and drew back the pink curtains: a faint light tinged with pale rose from the east revealed his face to her: steady and set and mature—the face of the man, the stranger, she had seen for the first time on the previous day.

"What is it, darling?" The endearment was as much an effort to bridge the gulf, to placate the stranger, as an expression of affection.

There was a chair beside her bed, and he went over to it and sat down.

"It's not much. Only that I'm stopping . . . with you." It's fun while it lasts . . . but now it's over. Carefree, gay adventuring belongs to youth, but only the irresponsible and the improvident spin it out beyond its time. Of course there's a wrench, a sharp, poignant pull of regret, as there is over all endings. It's damned hard to finish things, but without one thing finishing and another starting there'd be no growth. Something else would be waiting for him somewhere, although at the moment he couldn't quite determine the aspect of it. Still, there'd be something, there always was. . . .

"I'll get a job in Melbourne. I've learnt quite a lot about cars lately. I'll land something all right. It may be that soon—" Here it was. He hesitated, and amended it: "Soon you'll be able to give up working."

"Pat!" She breathed the name in an ecstasy of joy. What was he trying to say, so inadequately and with so much diffidence? That he was going to work for her—support her after all these years of relentless toil and sacrifice? It was too beautiful. She had not expected so much beauty in the world. If only she could thank him! But he was terribly unapproachable. . . .

Just then someone went whistling down the passage: Alfred Traynor had always been an early riser.

"There's one thing, though." Sternly he tempered her happiness. "Traynor gets his marching orders from to-day."

"Why, Pat—" She stared at him in amazement. "He's been here for years. I couldn't——"

"It's him or me." He rose. "Listen, Mum. Traynor's always wanted something. Now he may see his way clear to getting it. But even if he gets a wife, he needn't expect a stepson thrown in as part of the bargain. The day you married him would be the day you and I parted company."

It was the accumulation of a long but hardly realized dissatisfaction. He couldn't imagine how Conal had put up with Alfred Traynor so long. Certainly Conal had talked of kicking him out—but he'd never done it. Well, Conal mightn't have had the strength. If he'd loved Mum, though, surely he could have done something. If I loved someone, I wouldn't stand another man hanging round her, looking at her as I've seen Traynor look at Mum. If she was my woman, I'd kill a man who looked at her like that . . . kill him with these two hands. . . . And, by God! I'd care who ruled in my own house.

"Well, does he go?" he asked.

Julie stared up at his set face.

"If you say so, darling . . . anything you say. . . ." And she was quite surprised to discover that she didn't mind if Alfred went, she didn't mind in the least. He was nothing to her any more.

Pat's features relaxed; he smiled a little, and the hard mouth softened unexpectedly.

"Then there's nothing more to say."

He looked at her steadily: the golden-red hair, scarcely tinged with the grey she kept at bay so firmly, the curious green eyes, the unhappy mouth . . . this woman who was his mother, whose flesh he was, and to whom he owed every joy he had had and ever would have in living, this woman who loved him.

"O.K., Mum."

No more. No sentiment. A commitment, a destiny . . . somehow a compensation to Conal, who had once loved her, for the way he'd failed Conal. And because he'd failed Conal it would be impossible for him ever to fail anyone else quite so completely again. . . . But Conal had never asked anything of him, never made demands, never required of him protestations

of gratitude or affection, never intruded on his reserves. He was afraid his mother might. And he would harden if she did. Sentiment was something he couldn't take.

But Julie knew her Pat.

She said no more and watched him go. But in her heart she rejoiced, because—for the first time—a master had come home to Eastridge.

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